

### Native Range Map



## Channel Catfish

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Subphylum: Vertebrata  
Class: Actinopterygii  
Order: Siluriformes  
Family: Ictaluridae  
Genus: *Ictalurus*  
Species: *punctatus*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

### Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The channel catfish is found from the Hudson Bay region, south to Florida and northern Mexico, north through New Mexico, Colorado, and Montana to southern Manitoba. *Ictalurus punctatus* live in moderate to swiftly flowing streams, but they are also abundant in large reservoirs, lakes, ponds and some sluggish streams. They are usually found where bottoms are sand, gravel, or rubble, in preference to mud bottoms.
- **Exhibit Location:** USS Antiquities

### Characteristics

- Length: 15-24 inches (record is 52 inches); Weight: 2-4 pounds (record is 58 pounds)
- The channel catfish has a cylindrical body that lacks scales. The difference between this catfish and other catfishes is the deeply forked caudal fin (tail) with the top of the fin larger than the rounded bottom portion. They are speckled (spots disappear with age) with a darker back, a light-whitish belly, but overall color can vary from blue, black or olive. Generally, in muddy water, they are olive to yellowish-white, and in clear water they are blacker in color.
- They have eight sensory barbels (whiskers) around the mouth: 4 whiskers are on the chin, 2 on the snout and 1 in both corners of the mouth. The upper jaw (maxilla) protrudes in front of the lower jaw (mandible). They have 24-29 rays in the anal (rear) fin. The dorsal (top) and pectoral (chest) fins have hard spines. Males generally have larger heads and darker body color than the females. Taste buds are found on the interior of the mouth and over the body of the catfish.
- Another characteristic of *Ictalurus punctatus* is the ability to hear sounds with the help of the weberian apparatus (series of 4 or 5 modified vertebrae). This apparatus connects the swim bladder (an air-filled sac near the spinal column that helps maintain buoyancy) to the inner ear and conveys pressure changes and sound.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild-** 10-15 years; **In Captivity-** Unknown

### Behaviors

- Channel catfish feed mostly at night, and they are most active from sundown until midnight. The channel catfish responds to food sources through its ability to sense various amino acids in their environment, allowing them to differentiate among prey. Their barbels are used to locate the food.
- As a defense, they have mild venom in their pectoral fins and dorsal fin.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** None

### Reproduction

- Males are monogamous (having only 1 mate) within a mating season. The female spawns once a year. The male and female mate from May to July but the relationship is established earlier in the year. Sites for nests include weedy places near lake shores, under rock ledges and in tunnels of submerged turf. Prior to spawning, the male cleans the nest site by vigorously fanning with his fins and body. The spawning period lasts from 4-6 hours during which the female may lay from 2,000 -70,000 eggs, depending on her size. After the female releases the eggs in the nest, the male takes control and does not permit the female

to visit the eggs, as she will eat them. The male constantly fans the eggs with his fins to move water and remove waste products given off by the developing eggs.

- The eggs of the channel catfish average 3.2mm (0.13 inches) in diameter. The minimum size of the young at hatching is 6.4mm (0.25 inches). The young remain in the nest for about 7 days followed by schooling behavior.

### Diet

- **In the Wild:** Adults feed on insects, snails, crawfish, green algae, aquatic plants, seeds, small fish and terrestrial (living on land) insects. The young feed on insect larvae and other small aquatic invertebrates.
- **At the Zoo:** smelt, squid, vitamin gel

### Conservation Status

- *Ictalurus punctatus* are common and not endangered.
- At this time the IUCN does not consider the channel catfish to be vulnerable or threatened. There are many fisheries in the United States that raise the channel catfish. This catfish is a popular and abundant game fish and an important food fish in the southern United States.
- Predators: larger fish, especially from the sunfish family; birds such as eagles or herons

### Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- They have been widely introduced for sport fishing throughout the United States.
- People need to be careful handling the channel catfish because of the sharp spines and venom. Being cut by this fish is often compared to a paper cut.

### Sources:

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<http://srac.tamu.edu/tmppdfs/7841632-180fs.pdf>.