

Native Range Map



Pumpkinseed Sunfish

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Actinopterygii
Order: Perciformes
Family: Centrarchidae
Genus: *Lepomis*
Species: *gibbosus*



Photo courtesy of Janet Wisneski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** Although pumpkinseed sunfish have been introduced as a game fish throughout North America and many parts of Europe, their natural range extends from New Brunswick south to Georgia and westward to the upper Mississippi basin. They prefer shallow, warm water with abundant vegetation in which to hide.
- **Exhibit Location:** USS Antiquities

Characteristics

- Length: 6-8 inches, but can grow up to 10 inches
Weight: less than 1 pound (world record is 1pound 6 ounces)
- They are one of the most vibrant fresh water fishes, particularly the breeding males. Coloration includes orange, green, yellow or blue. They have speckles on their olive sides and back, with a yellow to orange belly and breast.
- Pumpkinseeds have a disc-shaped, slab-sided body with a small mouth and sharp spines. It is their body shape, resembling the seed of a pumpkin that inspired their name. The caudal (tail) fin is notched or slightly forked.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 8-9 years; **In Captivity** 12 years

Behaviors

- They are active during the day and rest near the bottom of the water or in protected areas in rocks or near submerged logs at night.
- They feed at all water levels from the surface to the bottom throughout the day, with heaviest feeding during the afternoon.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** food variation

Reproduction

- Sexual maturity is reached by 2 years.
- In late spring or early summer males build nests on sand or gravel bottoms in shallow water near the shore. Males use their caudal fins to sweep out shallow, saucer-shaped depressions about twice the length of the fish in diameter.
- Once the nests are completed, females arrive. After considerable chasing by the male, the female and male swim in circles side by side in the nest with bellies touching. The male then releases milt (sperm) and the female releases eggs. Females produce 1,500-3,000 eggs, depending on their size and age.
- The male aggressively guards the eggs that hatch in 3-5 days, and then the fry (hatchlings) for up to 11 more days.
- The young fish stay in or near the shallow breeding area and grow to about 2 inches in their first year.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** insects, mosquito larvae, small mollusks, snails, other crustaceans, smaller pumpkinseeds, minnow fry, worms
- **At the Zoo:** smelt, nutritional gel

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** not listed; **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- The pumpkinseed sunfish is quite common, particularly in northeastern North America.
- Pumpkinseed spawning grounds and activities can be disrupted by shoreline development, increased silt (fine particle deposits of clay and sand) from shoreline erosion and heavy lake use.
- Being very susceptible to silt development and pollution, the existence of sunfish is an excellent indicator of water cleanliness and health.
- Predators: muskrats, raccoons, hawks, ducks, herons and other shorebirds

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Other common names include punky, common sunfish, yellow sunfish, sun bass and pond perch.
- The pumpkinseed sunfish is closely related to smallmouth and largemouth bass.
- In the wild, they will breed with other sunfish, making exact identification difficult where multiple species of sunfish exist.
- They were introduced into Europe, where they are now considered a nuisance.
- Sunfish are particularly prone to “stunting”. Lakes that have good spawning habitat but not much food can produce swarms of small adult sunnies that never grow larger than 4-5 inches.
- They have shown a strong instinct for a home range. When captured fish were marked and released in a different area in a lake, a significant percentage of them returned to their original location.

Sources:

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