

The Catfish



Flathead Catfish



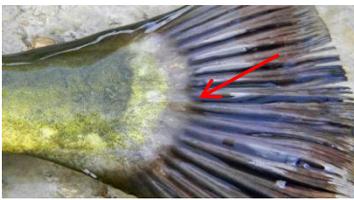
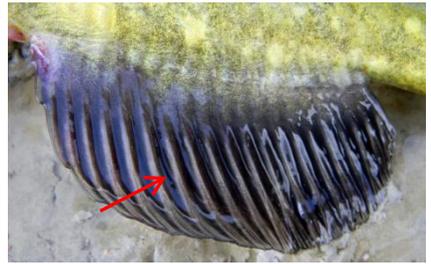
- A flathead is a large growing catfish. It is easily identified by a broad, unforked, square tail, a large mouth spanning the width of the head, mottled coloration and a flat, sloping head.
- Colors vary widely because it is able to adjust coloration to match its surroundings.
- A flathead spawns in cavities with males aggressively guarding the eggs and fry.
- It can be found statewide in a variety of water bodies.
- Also called the “yellow cat,” “mud cat” and “Opelousas catfish.”



Fish Fact: A Flathead is a strict carnivore. It will eat virtually any live food that will fit in its mouth – including other catfish. It is such an efficient predator that introduced populations can be detrimental to other species.



Black Bullhead

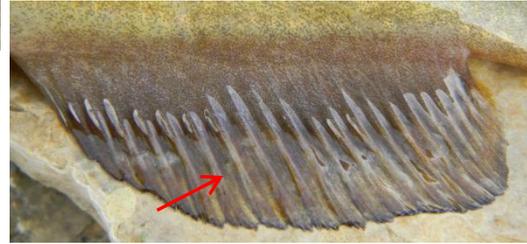
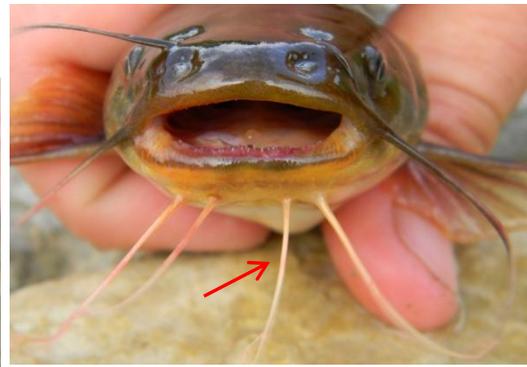


- The black bullhead looks similar to yellow bullheads, but can be distinguished by its dark chin whiskers and 17 to 21 anal fin rays.
- It is often reported to lack serrated pectoral fins, but in fact, it often has serrations, so identifications should not be based on this trait alone.
- The tail is square, not forked.
- It is also called a "mudcat."

Biologist Tip: A mature black bullhead sometimes has a white crescent at the base of its tail.



Yellow Bullhead



- A yellow bullhead looks very similar to a black bullhead. It can be distinguished by its light-colored chin whiskers.
- The anal fin is also longer than a black bullhead's, with about 26 fin rays.
- The tail is square, not forked.
- The yellow bullhead is also called "mudcat."

Fish Fact: The yellow bullhead can be found in a wide range of habitat, but prefer clearer waters than a black bullhead. Like a black bullhead, its pectoral spines are very sharp and contain a mild poison. Despite popular belief, they cannot sting but can inject the poison if the spines break the skin. The result can be quite painful, but will fade quickly.

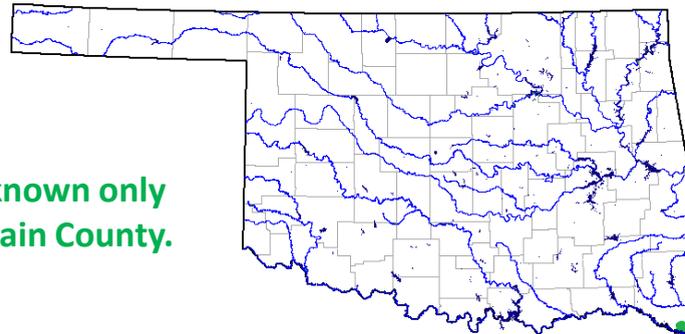


Brown Bullhead



- The brown bullhead looks similar to yellow and black bullheads, and has intermediate characteristics of the two species.
- Its chin whiskers are grey and its body coloration is mottled. There are 21 to 24 anal fin rays.

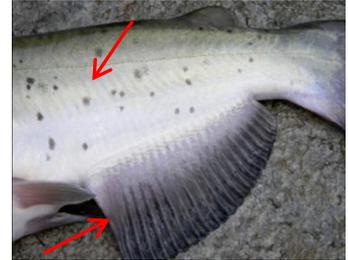
Biologist Tip: In Oklahoma, the brown bullhead is known only from a few locations along the Red River in McCurtain County. It is infrequently encountered by anglers.



Channel Catfish



- The channel catfish is probably the most common and widespread catfish in Oklahoma. It can be found in ponds, lakes, streams and rivers. It is quite adaptable and does well in both clear and turbid waters.
- Young channel catfish are easily identified by the numerous black spots or speckles on their sides.
- The channel catfish is larger than a couple pounds and often lack spots, so it can look much like a blue catfish. The anal fin of a channel catfish is more rounded than in a blue catfish. It contains about 24 to 29 rays.



Biologist Tip: The appearance of channel catfish varies widely, depending on age, sex, time of year, water clarity and if it lives in calm or flowing water. For positive identification, refer to the channel cat or blue cat key.



Blue Catfish



- The blue catfish is the largest catfish in North America, reaching well over 100 pounds.
- It has a deeply forked tail similar to a channel catfish, but lacks spots on the body. It is often deeper bodied with long, steeply sloping foreheads that can give it a “hump-back” appearance.
- The anal fin is longer and straighter than in a channel catfish.
- A blue catfish has stocked extensively in Oklahoma, and currently, its population numbers are doing very well.
- The blue cat can be short and stocky or long, sleek and slender. Its color can be dark or light depending on the habitat, gender and time of year.

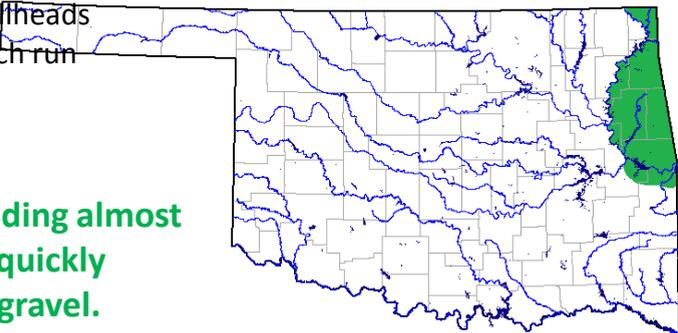


Biologist Tip: The blue catfish is active year-round, and can often be caught in shallow water (even during the coldest months of the year). It can sometimes be difficult to tell it apart from channel catfish. Compare the channel and blue cat keys for positive identification methods.

Slender Madtom



- Madtoms are a group of miniature catfish that live mainly in clear streams of eastern Oklahoma.
- The slender madtom is the most common madtom in Oklahoma Ozark streams. It reaches about four inches in length and has a long, eel-like body.
- The slender madtoms can be distinguished from young bullheads and flathead catfish by its joined adipose and tail fins, which run continuously for about half of their body length.



Fish Fact: A madtom is very shy and secretive, spending almost all of its time underneath rocks or leaf litter. It can quickly disappear by burrowing straight down into stream gravel.