



Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*)

Channel catfish are native to Alabama and found throughout North America. They are considered one of the most important food fish in Alabama. They are produced commercially in ponds or harvested from public waters.

Channel catfish (cats) are slender with a protruding jaw and deeply forked caudal fin.* Young catfish have gray color on the back and silver on the side and rear of the fish. Adult channel cats have dark gray along the back, blending to light yellow or greenish yellow down the side and white to the rear. Both young and adult cats have black spots present on their sides. One tell-tale difference between a blue cat and channel is the shape of the head. A blue has a wedge shaped head whereas the channel cat head is curved. The pectoral fin is sharper in a blue cat when compared to the channel cat.* The anal fin is more rounded in a channel cat than a blue.* Adult channel catfish reproduce May through August and grow quickly their first three years of life. In 1967, the Alabama record channel catfish was caught in Inland Lake in Blount County, and it weighed 40 pounds.

Channel cats eat insect larvae, crayfish, mollusks, and small fish*. Most channel cat anglers use cheese, chicken, dough balls, red worms, and cut bait to catch fish. Channel cats are found mostly in slow to moderate current. They inhabit rivers, reservoirs, small to large streams, backwaters, swamps, and oxbow lakes. Channel cats and other Alabama aquatic animals live in habitats that are diverse and healthy. All living things benefit from a healthy watershed and need clean water for survival. *

Vocabulary

Anal fin – a single fin on the bottom of a fish behind the anus.

Caudal fin – the tail fin on a fish that's used for propulsion.

Larvae – an immature insect of a species that changes (undergoes metamorphosis) into adult; larvae and adults look very different (caterpillars are larvae and butterflies are adults).

Pectoral fins – a pair of side fins on the bottom of a fish.

Watershed – all the land and streams that drain down to one point.

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The drawing is original artwork by Julie Harris Mitchell. The photograph and some of the information are from *Fishes of Alabama and the Mobile Basin*.