



northern snakehead

US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Building Strong®

Common Name	northern snakehead
Genus & Species	<i>Channa argus</i>
Family	Channidae (snakeheads)
Order	Perciformes (perches)
Class	Actinopterygii (ray-finned fishes)

Diagnosis: The northern snakehead is most similar in appearance to the native bowfin (*Amia calva*). It is recognized by an elongated, fusiform body type with a singular, spineless dorsal and anal fin that runs the length of the body. The caudal fin is rounded and body coloration is dark to light brown and mottled with dark blotches. The head is compressed dorsally and is triangular in shape. The eyes are positioned far forward on the head and are preceded by tubular, anterior nostrils.

Ecology: Members of the genus *Channa* have been described as voracious predators and the northern snakehead is no exception with a wide range in prey size and species composition. Northern snakeheads reach sexual maturity at 2-3 years of age in their native range but have been observed to mature after only one year of growth in Arkansas populations. Adult females create floating nests by clipping aquatic plants and releasing eggs on top. Parental guarding of the nests can be expected by both sexes and continues several weeks after the fry have hatched, reducing the chances of predation. Reproduction peaks in June and continues through August.



Habitat & Distribution: Northern snakeheads originate in China, Russia, and Korea and were introduced to North America through the aquarium and Asian food market. In the U.S. there have been recorded sightings and captures from across the nation but many of these reports were isolated occurrences. Established populations are known to exist in Maryland and Virginia, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and New York. The temperature range for the northern snakehead ranges from near freezing up to 30°C. The species is generally found in areas with dense floating vegetation and rarely in water greater than 2 meters in depth. The northern snakehead can gulp air to survive areas of low dissolved oxygen.

Status: The first established population was confirmed in Crofton Pond, Maryland, 2002; however, recent reports indicate that it had spread into the Potomac River. In 2008, reports of the northern snakehead came from Little Piney Creek in Arkansas. A massive rotenone treatment was performed, but as of July 2010, monitoring efforts are still reporting an established population. There has been one confirmed sighting in Burnham Harbor, Chicago, IL in 2004, but it is not believed a population has become established.

USGS Fact Sheet: <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?speciesid=2265>