



black carp

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Common Name	black carp
Genus & Species	<i>Mylopharyngodon piceus</i>
Family	Cyprinidae (minnows and carps)
Order	Cypriniformes (carps, minnows, loaches, suckers)
Class	Actinopterygii (ray-finned fishes)

Diagnosis: The black carp is in the minnow family, Cyprinidae, and shares many physical characteristics with other members of this group. The dorsal fin is short and pointed consisting of 7-8 rays and is located above the pelvic fins. The anal fin is set back further, closer to the caudal fin than most native minnows of the area. The black carp most closely resembles the grass carp with large dark edged scales that form a cross-hatched pattern on an olive to dark brown body. It can be distinguished from the grass carp by the pharyngeal teeth which are shaped like human molars in contrast to the deeply grooved pharyngeal teeth of the grass carp.



Ecology: Black carp populations may adversely affect native mollusk populations as their main diet at maturity consists primarily of snails, mussels, and clams. They are also known to scavenge for fish eggs, aquatic insects, and benthic crustaceans. As juveniles, black carp will feed primarily on zooplankton. Sexual maturation occurs anywhere from 6-11 years in age. Rapid growth of these fish occurs from fry through maturity and female fecundity is especially high; producing up to over 1 million eggs per spawning event. Eggs are laid in mass over the river bottom and once fertilized are carried downstream to more stagnant waters. Spawning occurs once water temperatures have increased to 26-30°C.

Habitat & Distribution: The native range of black carp covers most Pacific drainages within eastern Asia ranging from the Pearl River basin to the Amur River basin in China. Native populations may also be present in far eastern Russia and as far south as northern Vietnam. It was introduced to the United States through the aquaculture trade as a biological control agent to nuisance mollusk populations in fish farms and also as a source of food in Asian markets. Black carp have been observed from Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. They are reported from a wide range of habitats including rivers, ponds, and lakes from water depths up to 10 meters. This species is strictly found in freshwaters and has a global range from 15° to 53°N latitude.

Status: The first reported escape of black carp from aquaculture ponds into an open river system occurred in 1994 in Missouri as a containment pond flooded into the Osage River within the Missouri River drainage basin. Subsequent flooding events on the lower Mississippi River have produced similar escape events from Louisiana and Mississippi. Black carp have been recorded as far north as pool 24 in the upper Mississippi River as well as the Ohio River within Illinois state boundaries. The most recent capture occurred on July 1, 2010 by a commercial fisherman near Hamburg, IL on the Mississippi River. Black carp are estimated to be able to spread throughout the continental United States based on their similarities with the widely distributed grass carp.

USGS Fact Sheet: <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.aspx?SpeciesID=573>