

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Bowfin *Amia calva*

Range/Habitat

- The bowfin is found from the Mississippi River eastward to the St. Lawrence River and south from Texas to Florida.
- It prefers sluggish waters, swamps, sloughs, pools and backwaters of lowland streams, usually near rooted vegetation.

Physical Characteristics

- The bowfin has a long, nearly cylindrical body and a large head.
- It has a large mouth that is equipped with sharp teeth.
- It has a long dorsal fin, which extends to more than half the length of its back.
- The male has a spot rimmed with orange-yellow at the top of the caudal (tail) fin, while the female has no spot or the orange-yellow rimming is absent.
- The bowfin has rounded pectoral, pelvic and caudal fins.
- It has olive coloration on its backside and cream-yellow on underside. There are darker wavy bands on its dorsal and caudal fin (fins on backside).

Diet/Feeding

- The bowfin is a voracious feeder eating all types of fishes (making up about 80 percent) and filling the remainder of its diet with crayfishes. Remains of several species of birds, snakes, salamanders and snails have been found in its stomach.
- Bowfin can be quite effective in keeping fish populations in check.

Conservation Status

- The bowfin is becoming less common in certain areas such as Alabama due to loss of habitat.
- It is not listed on the IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- The bowfin has a number of common names including dogfish, mudfish, grindle, grinnel, prairie bass, cypress bass, cypress trout, cottonfish, scaly cat and mudjack.
- The bowfin is a very primitive fish and therefore is often referred to as a “living fossil.”
- Its swim bladder functions as a lung that enables it to live in oxygen poor waters. In extreme conditions, it can live out of water for a day.

Sources

- Fishes of Alabama by Herbert T. Bochung, Jr. and Richard L. Mayden p. 120-121.
- Freshwater Fishes (Peterson's Field Guides) by Lawrence M. Page/Brooks M. p. 31-32.

- McClane's Field guide to Freshwater Fishes of North America by A. J. McClane p. 178-179.
- <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/b1/bowfin.asp>.