

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Bluegill

Lepomis macrochirus

Range /Habitat

- The bluegill is a North American fresh water fish that occurs in the St. Lawrence, Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins and from Quebec to northern Mexico.
- This species is found in lakes, ponds, reservoirs and sluggish streams, specifically in vegetated areas. It is most abundant in lakes and ponds with shallow water that is near the cover of vegetation, submerged wood or rocks.
- It also occurs in the less brackish portions of coastal estuaries.

Physical Characteristics

- The adult bluegill weighs about 12 oz. (0.3 kg) and reaches about 9.5 inches (24 cm).
- This species may be distinguished from other sunfish by the dark spot near the base of the pectoral fin, dark vertical bars on its sides that fade into the belly, and a relatively small mouth.
- The back and upper sides are usually dark olive green blending to lavender, brown, copper or orange. Some individuals have an overall blue body sheen with yellow and green flecks on the sides; the bluegill has a white to yellow color on the belly.
- The distinguishing fin spot is faint on young fish and the dark side bars are thinner.
- The bluegill's body is extremely compressed and it sometimes displays two blue streaks from its chin to the edge of its gill cover.
- It has long, pointed pectoral (side) fins.
- A breeding male color pattern is a blue head and back, a bright red-orange breast and belly with black pelvic fins.

Diet/Feeding

- The adult feeds on snails, small crayfish, insects, spiders, worms, fish eggs and small minnows.
- The young feed on crustaceans, insects and worms.
- It will feed primarily near vegetation or other cover.
- It will shift from one feeding area to another quickly depending on food abundance. When food is abundant it will eat larger prey items but will optimize its foraging strategy and be less selective when food is less abundant.

Conservation Status

- The bluegill is not on the IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- The bluegill is a popular sport fish in the U.S. and probably accounts for more individual catches than any other game fish.
- It is a member of the sunfish family whose members are commonly referred to as "sunnies."
- The average lifespan of the bluegill is between 5 and 6 years.
- The juvenile bluegill is often prey for birds, water snakes and larger fish.
- This species is the state fish of Illinois.

- Bluegill spawning takes place from April to September. It is the male's responsibility to pick a good nesting spot and to build the nest. He often prefers to build in areas where other bluegills have constructed their nests, which sometimes creates a network of touching, "honeycombed" nesting sites. The female lays her eggs in the nest and the male guards them until they hatch. He continues his watch even after the young emerge.
- Non-nest building males occasionally mimic females by assuming their coloration and behavioral patterns. The mimics will enter the nests of the nest-building males and circle with them as if spawning. When the females enter the nests, the mimic apparently participates in fertilizing the eggs.

Sources

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fish/infish/species/bgl/bgl.htm>

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