

Green Sunfish – *Lepomis cyanellus*

Distribution – Originally restricted to east-central North America, west to Appalachians from Ontario and New York to eastern North Dakota, south to Georgia and northeastern Mexico. Introduced throughout the United States. Native to New Mexico east of the continental divide; introduced in Arizona. Body often thicker than other sunfish; mouth larger than other sunfish; upper jaw extends to beneath eye pupil; olive to blue-green back and side extending to light or yellow belly; irregular stripes of blue on head; black ear flap with white or yellow edge; may have dusky bars on side; large dark spot at rear base of dorsal and anal fins; rounded pectoral fin; complete lateral line; males with yellow-white band on outer margins of dorsal, tail and anal fins. The green sunfish is a benthic organism, meaning that it lives and feeds near the bottom of the water. It is an opportunistic insectivore and piscivore in that it feeds on whatever insects and smaller fish are nearby. Its mouth size allows it to consume larger food items than other members of the sunfish group. Its ability to adapt to environmental extremes in temperature, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, and water flow allows it to be a pioneer species, or one of the first species to occupy a stream. When the water in a stream gets low, the green sunfish may be the only species surviving in a small isolated pool. It repopulates once the stream flows again. Green sunfish inhabit sluggish rivers, creeks, pools, lake shores with vegetation; clear or turbid water; prefers small, slow streams, backwaters, and ponds with few other sunfish. Size: 5 – 6 in. (12.7 – 15.24 cm) long; seldom longer than 8 in. (20.32 cm)

Food Habits - Adults: aquatic and terrestrial insects, crayfish, other fish; young: small crustaceans, aquatic insect larvae

Life History - Spring and summer; eggs hatch in 2 days; nest made in shallow water by male and consists of many small depressions on fine gravel or sand near cover; guarded by male for 5 – 7 days, become reproductive in 3 years.

Life Span – Life span of the green sunfish is about 4 – 6 years.

Sporting Qualities – Green sunfish provide good sport for kids using ultra-light fishing gear.

Threats – Pollution and habitat loss.