

## **Black Bullhead – *Ictalurus melas***

**Range** - The native range southern Ontario, Great lakes and St. Lawrence River, south to Gulf of Mexico and northern Mexico, and from Montana to Appalachians. Introduced throughout the United States and northern Mexico. Common in ponds, pools of all sizes, swampy areas, streams and rivers. Dark to olive color on dorsal side, creamy on ventral side. *Ameiurus* is Greek and means "primitive" or "curtailed" in reference to the slight notch in the caudal fin; *melas* is also Greek and means "black." Black bullheads are typically black to greenish-black on the back, ranging to gray or white on the belly. However, in muddy water the back may be yellowish-brown. Chin barbels are dark or black, never white. The anal fin has 17-21 rays.

**Sporting Qualities** - Black bullheads are not generally considered an important gamefish, though they are readily fished for by anglers. A variety of baits may be used to catch them, but worms are usually the best. The largest specimen reported to date in Texas was 4.53 pounds.

**Life History** - During late spring or early summer black bullheads excavate nests in mud bottoms and spawn. Areas with some sort of cover are preferred. Nests contain golden-yellow egg masses which are guarded by both parents (at least one is present at all times). Eggs hatch in four to six days. Fry begin to school in compact balls which are guarded by adults until individuals reach about one inch in length.

**Food Habits** - Black bullheads are omnivorous, feeding primarily from the bottom on a wide range of plant and animal material, both live and dead. Fingerlings feed almost exclusively on crustaceans. Immature aquatic insects and crustaceans often comprise a considerable proportion of the adult diet.

**Life Span** - The average life span is usually less than five years, and most adults are less than one pound. However, some individuals may live more than 10 years and reach eight pounds.