

Flathead Catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*)

Do they have any other names?

Flathead catfish are also called shovelhead cat, yellow cat, mud cat, goujan, appaluchion, and johnnie cat.

Why are they called flathead catfish?

They are called flatheads because they have a broad, flattened head. *Pylodictis* is Greek for “mud fish” and *olivaris* is Latin for “olive-colored.”

What do they look like?

Flatheads are a slender catfish with a broad flattened head and a protruding lower jaw. The tail fin is slightly forked with the upper lobe lighter in color than the lower lobe. The back and sides are pale yellow to light brown and mottled with dark brown or black. The belly is pale yellow or cream-white.



Photo Credit: Rick Hill, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

Where do they live in Indiana?

Flathead catfish are common in the state and live in large rivers, lakes, and reservoirs.

What kind of habitat do they need?

Flathead catfish in rivers and streams stay in pools and prefer to have some type of cover like logs or piles of drift.

How do they reproduce?

Flatheads spawn in June and July and the eggs are laid in a nest either in a natural cavity or constructed near a submerged depression. The parent fish agitates the eggs continuously to provide oxygen and keep silt off the eggs. Once the eggs hatch the fry stay in the nest in a school and then they leave and separate. The male will guard the fry in the nest for about 7 days after they hatch.

How old are they when they reproduce?

Flatheads can reproduce when they are 4 or 5 years old.

How long do they live?

Flathead catfish live up to about 20 years old.

How fast do they grow in Indiana?

Flatheads reach a length of about 3 inches in the first year and adults are commonly 15 to 45 inches long and 1 to 45 pounds. Some can grow as large as 70 pounds or more.

What do they eat?

Young flatheads remain in the riffles and feed on aquatic insects at night. Adults move into the riffles at night to feed on fish and crayfish.

What eats them?

The adult flatheads do not have many predators, but the young are eaten by other fish and fish-eating birds.

Are they safe to eat?

Flathead catfish are edible, however the older the fish is, the more toxins there are built up in the fish. To see the consumption advisory for flatheads in different water bodies or if you are in a high risk group such as a pregnant woman or a child consult the fish consumption advisory at: www.in.gov/isdh/23650.htm . *The fish consumption advisories that are posted are based on a model that people are consuming 8 oz. of fish on 225 days each year over 70 years.* Most people do not eat fish anywhere close to that amount.

How do I fish for them?

Most flathead catfish are caught on trot lines, by jugging, or by still-fishing with rod

and reel. Live or freshly killed baits are most effective on flatheads.

How is Indiana managing flathead catfish?

Flathead catfish are native to Indiana and are not stocked by the state. They are observed in fisheries surveys and a 10 fish bag limit regulation has been placed on flathead harvest to manage the flathead populations.