

WILDLIFE

Redear Sunfish

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Redear sunfish

(*Lepomis microlophus*) is a member of the sunfish family. This family of fish contains many species, including bluegill, largemouth bass

and white crappie, just to name a few. Redear and other sunfish, sometimes called bream, are often incorrectly referred to as perch. Perch are very different, belonging to a separate family of fish not related to redear or other sunfish. Common species from the perch family include walleye, sauger, yellow perch and darters. Also, many people refer to any small sunfish seen or caught as a bluegill even though it actually may be a redear sunfish, green sunfish, bluegill, hybrid sunfish or other sunfish species. Therefore, when stocking a pond or making fisheries management decisions, it is important to properly identify sunfish species.

Redear sunfish are mostly known by the red trim along the opercular (gill) flap. The shape and size of their bodies, mouths and fins are similar to bluegill. Redear sunfish body color varies, depending on water quality, sex and age. The dorsal fin usually has 10 spines, but may range from nine to 11, whereas the anal fin has three spines.



Redear sunfish, mostly known by the red trim along the gill flap, can grow up to 12 inches long and weigh as much as 2 pounds.

Redear sunfish, sometimes called shellcracker, feed on aquatic insects, snails, small fish and other small aquatic animals. Snails are intermediate hosts of yellow and black grubs. The larvae of these grubs are often found in the fins and in the muscles of largemouth bass and other fish species. By eating snails, redear sunfish disrupt the yellow grub's life cycle, possibly reducing the grub population in a given body of water.

For more information about grubs, read "Parasite Problems" at www.noble.org/ag/wildlife/parasiteprobs/.

Redear sunfish make an excellent forage for largemouth bass; however, redear sunfish do not produce as many offspring as bluegill. When stocking a pond for a bluegill, redear sunfish and largemouth bass fishery, stock 250 bluegill and 250 redear fingerlings that are 1 to 3 inches long per acre in late summer or early fall. ▶

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During the following spring, stock 50 to 100 largemouth bass fingerlings per acre.

Redear sunfish become sexually mature when approximately 3 to 5 inches long and spawn when water temperatures are 65° F to 89° F, but prefer 70° F to 75° F. Spawning beds are usually found in water 1 to 5 feet deep. To construct the nest, the male sweeps away debris, creating a shallow circular depression. Substrates such as sand or gravel are chosen as preferred nest sites. Redear sunfish are considered colony spawners, meaning

multiple males tend to construct their nests in one location.

Once the nest is complete, the male begins searching for a female. After the male finds a female, the two circle the nest. Females usually release only a portion of their eggs in the first spawn and the remaining eggs in one or more successive spawns. After fertilizing the eggs, the male defends the nest from predators and aerates the eggs by periodically fanning the nest. Incubation takes six to 10 days depending on water temperature.

Fry (newly hatched fish) feed on the yolk sac of the egg for the first few days of life. Once the yolk sac has been depleted, the fry feed on zooplankton (microscopic animals). The young grow rapidly at this stage and, as their mouth size increases, so does their prey size.

Redear sunfish have the ability to grow up to 12 inches long and weigh as much as 2 pounds, making them an excellent addition to a fishery. When stocking sunfish, consider adding redear to the mix. ■