



Newsletter for the south Florida canal and urban pond angler

Our Purpose: To identify excellent south Florida freshwater fishing opportunities and to provide urban anglers with relevant information that will enhance the quality of their outdoor experience.



**Don't miss it —
South Florida minnow
and baitfish identifier inside!**

Anglers' Legacy!

By Bob Wattendorf, FWC

We Floridians take our fishing seriously. The proof lies in the actions anglers take to ensure a bright fishing future. Between April 1, 2008 and March 31, 2009, 695 active Florida anglers took a pledge to introduce fishing each year to at least one person who had not previously enjoyed the sport.

The **Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF)** announced that FWC received more **Anglers' Legacy** pledges than any other state last year.

The **Anglers' Legacy** is important to Floridians for several reasons. First, fishing continues to be one of the most relaxing and satisfying ways for individuals to get outdoors, engage in a fun, active form of recreation and reconnect with nature. Getting outdoors and being active not only leads to a healthier lifestyle, but it also creates endless opportunities for social interactions that can be much more fulfilling when you are away from the television, phone and other interruptions.

In his recent commencement address at the University of Notre Dame, President Barack Obama related the story of Father Ted Hesburgh, former president emeritus of Notre Dame, who as a member of the Civil Rights Commission in 1964, helped recommend the 12

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**Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission**

MyFWC.com

resolutions that would become the Civil Rights Act. Asked by President Dwight D. Eisenhower how Father Ted managed to lead the Commission to concurrence, his response was “they discovered that they were all fishermen. And so he quickly readied a boat for a twilight trip out on the lake. They fished, and they talked, and they changed the course of history.” That is the power of time spent on the water away from other stresses, enjoying nature and communicating openly.

Beyond the benefits to the individual, RBFF research shows that each fulfilled pledge results on average in the purchase of 3.2 fishing licenses, which support critical management and conservation efforts

here in Florida and helps ensure the future of recreational fishing. Without those funds, especially in times as fiscally challenging as these, the state would have a difficult time ensuring safe and sustainable fishing opportunities for all of our residents and visitors. Fortunately, a resident license only costs \$15.50, and an average angler uses that license for 17 trips a year, each averaging more than four hours. So fishing can be one of the less expensive forms of recreation, and even allows for realization of the Chinese proverb: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

Each new angler who becomes an ambassador receives an Anglers’ Legacy decal and additional program communications. There is also a rewards program that includes tailored newsletters, special prizes and benefits to encourage ambassadors to keep on sharing the sport.

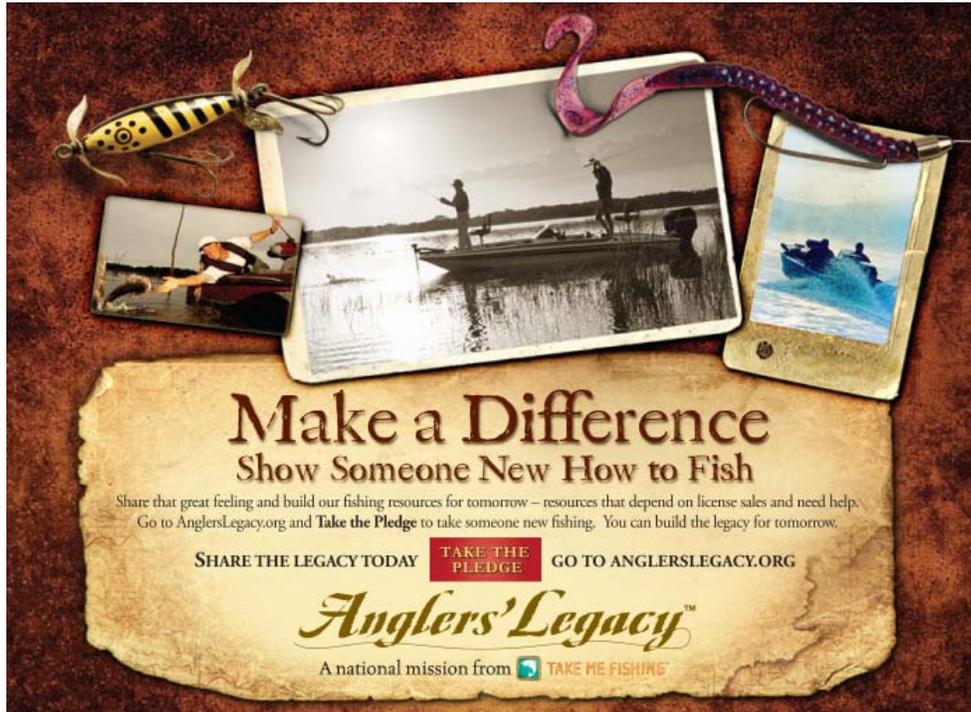
To take the Anglers’ Legacy Pledge yourself, go to:

www.takemefishing.org/community/anglers-legacy/take-the-pledge

and enter **FLFWC09** in the partner code field.

The FWC and RBFF also partner in other ways to learn about what inspires anglers and boaters to get out on the water and enjoy what is often described as one of America’s favorite and most traditional pastimes. In the process of learning about our resource users, we seek to find ways to make participation easier and more enjoyable for them.

The www.TakeMeFishing.org Web



site, as well as our own www.MyFWC.com and www.GetOutdoorsFlorida.net Web sites all build on that learning to provide resources for anglers to find the best times, places and ways to go fishing safely and ethically.

Some anglers also will be receiving a reminder in the mail to renew their fishing license. Anyone who renews their fishing license by August 1, 2009, and then calls 866-967-5600, can receive a free six-month subscription to the popular **Florida Wildlife** magazine.

Historically, Americans have turned to nature to soothe their souls and find relaxation by simply casting a lure and letting their imaginations wander while awaiting the next bite.

“Who hears the rippling of rivers will not utterly despair of anything,” Henry David Thoreau said. Summer is upon us; maybe it’s time for you to renew your fishing license and

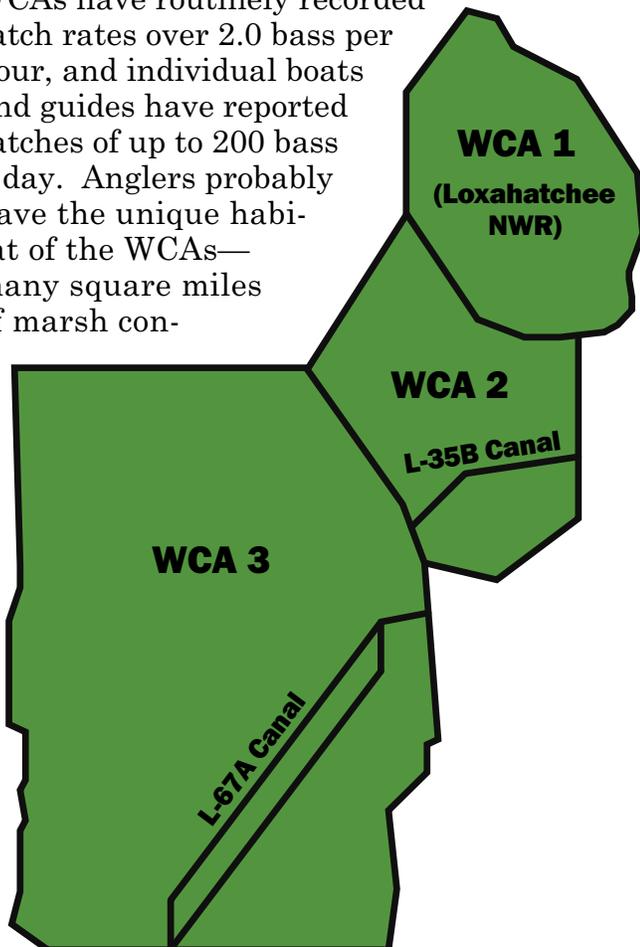
make the pledge to take a child, friend or stranger fishing and see what history you can make.

Tips on introducing others to angling can be found at MyFWC.com/docs/Freshwater/CITFSH2b.pdf.

Instant licenses are available at MyFWC.com/License or by calling **888-FISH-FLORIDA (347-4356)**. Report violators by calling ***FWC** or **#FWC** on your cell phone, or **888-404-3922**. Visit MyFWC.com/Fishing/ for more Fish Busters' columns.

Fish biology: Marsh-canal relationships

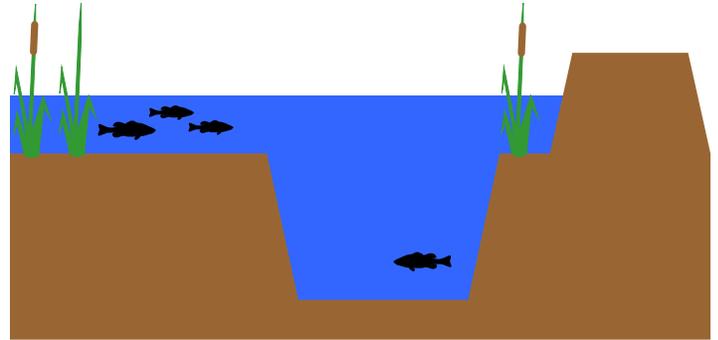
The Everglades Water Conservation Areas (WCA) have consistently posted the highest largemouth bass catch rates in the state. While the statewide average is about 0.25 bass per hour (equal to one bass caught for every four hours fishing), angler surveys in the WCAs have routinely recorded catch rates over 2.0 bass per hour, and individual boats and guides have reported catches of up to 200 bass a day. Anglers probably have the unique habitat of the WCAs—many square miles of marsh con-



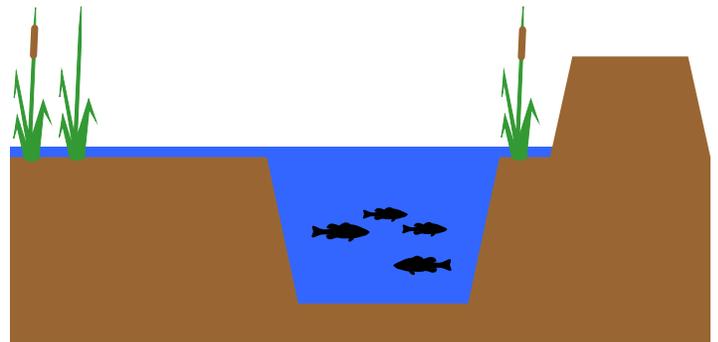
The Everglades Water Conservation Areas (WCA).

nected to bordering canals—to thank for this phenomenal fishing.

A key factor is that the marsh and canals are interconnected, allowing water—and fish!—to travel back and forth between them. As water levels drop, marsh water flows into the bordering canals. Thankfully for anglers, the fish seem to follow. While it would be hard to track an individual fish's movements between marsh and canal, there is little question that when water levels go down, catch rates go up.



When water levels are high, bass have easy access to the marsh.

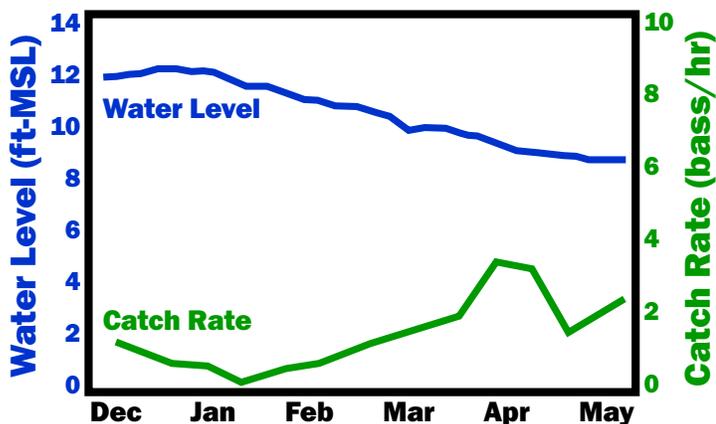


When water levels are low, bass probably move from the marsh into the canal.

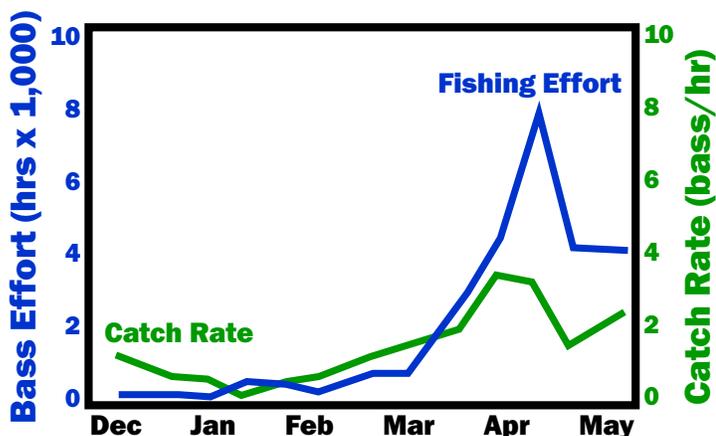
What appears to be occurring is that bass from acres and acres of marsh are following the dropping water flow into the canals, where they might remain until water levels rise enough to allow an easy return to the marsh. The mouths of the eight marsh access trails along the L-67A Canal in WCA 3 are particularly good places to fish, as bass are attracted to the current resulting from the emptying marsh. The canals provide a deep-water refuge for the bass, and a fishing boon for anglers.

WCA bass tend to be more plentiful than large. The majority of fish caught will usually be smaller, but fish up to eight pounds or so are available. Anglers can use jumbo lures to try to bypass some of the smaller bass if

desired; it is also worth noting that flipping in the thick vegetation along the canal edges seems to produce many of the bigger bass.



When water levels in WCA 3 go down, largemouth bass catch rates in the L-67A Canal tend to go up. This data is from a FWC “creel survey” (see City Fisher Issues 9 and 36) completed in 1994-95.



The fishermen follow the fish! When bass catch rates went up, the number of hours bass fishermen spent trying to catch them also went up. When catch rates temporarily dropped, so did fishing effort. This data is from the same 1994-95 creel survey.

The main access to the WCAs are Sawgrass Recreation Area (954-389-0202) for WCA 2, and Holiday Park (954-434-8111) for WCA 3. Good ramps, as well as boat rentals, are available at each site. Ramps are also available on the east and west sides of US 27. WCA 1, perhaps better known as Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge (561-732-3684), can be accessed through the main Refuge entrance off SR 7/US 441 or through facilities located near 20 Mile Bend (SR 80) and at the end of Lox Road.

To barb, or not to barb?

A group of beginning anglers recently reminded me of the importance of barbless hooks. I was conducting fishing clinics for a school field trip, and most of the participating kids had little or no experience fishing. The results were predictable: many fish were hooked well after they took the bait, and no nearby bush or tree was safe! However, at the end of the day not a single fish was released DOA, and nearly all were unhooked within seconds of being landed. I credit the barbless hooks I always use for these fishing clinics.

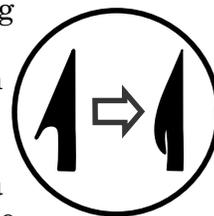
I’ve been fishing barbless for years, and my very limited fishing time usually makes me a catch-and-release angler (I’d rather spend all of that time fishing instead of using some of it to clean fish). Even my bigger plugs with three sets of trebles have all been rendered barbless. Most of the time, anything I catch can be released in seconds. If a fish does become fouled by a lure (such as a three-trebled Rapala, one of my favorites for bass), it’s much easier to “untangle” than it would be with barbs preventing hook points from being removed. Before I started de-barbing all my hooks, I found that such fouling situations usually got worse before they got better.

I’m particularly insistent on using barbless hooks for all my bait fishing. With few exceptions, most baits will stay in place. Recently, I’ve been using barbless circle hooks more and more often, and have had good results with almost every fish ending up hooked in the corner of the mouth. For smaller fish, I like de-barbed Aberdeen hooks because the long shank is easy to grab with fingers or pliers.

For de-barbing, I prefer a small pair of needle-nosed pliers. If you can find a pair with a non-serrated surface, that seems to work a bit better at mashing barbs entirely flat.

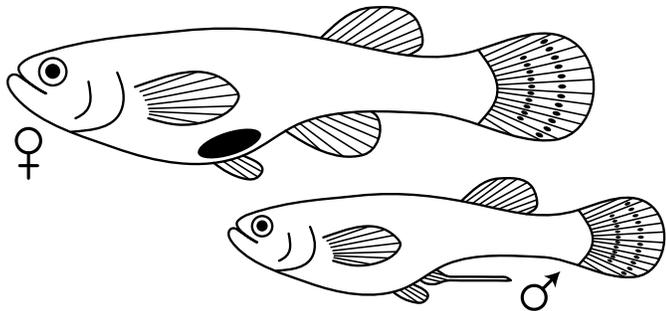
One of the few potential drawbacks of going barbless is the possibility of more lost fish that throw the hook. Keeping a tight line will reduce most such losses. In fact, the “big fish” from my series of fishing clinics was a near-four-pound bass landed on a barbless #8 Aberdeen after a several-minute battle. The inexperienced angler kept the line tight by cranking like crazy, drag slipping, the entire time.

So take a lesson experienced by the kids in my fishing clinics—de-barb those hooks!

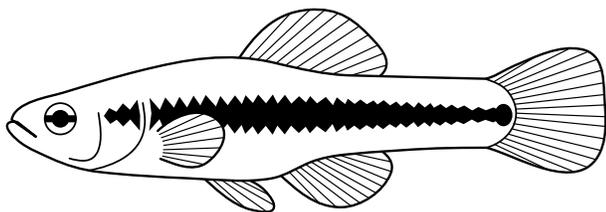


Minnow and baitfish identifier

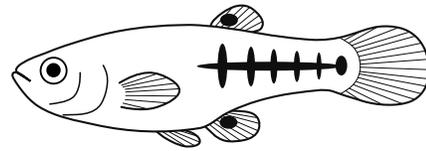
You may be pretty familiar with anything that might bite on the end of your line, but do you know your minnows? Shown below are the species you're most likely to come across in southeast Florida, either via cast net or dip net. How many have you seen? (*Note: Drawings are not to scale; check text for actual sizes.*)



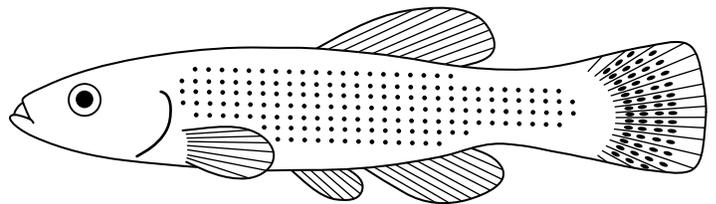
Mosquitofish (2 ½") — The most common fish in our canals and ponds, this rather plain fish can be identified by the one or two broken, vertical stripes on its tail. Female is easily told by the distinct black spot on the belly. Melanistic (dark-pigmented) forms may have black spots sprinkled over the body or even appear entirely black. Derives its name from its preferred food of mosquito larvae. A fair bait for bluegill and small bass.



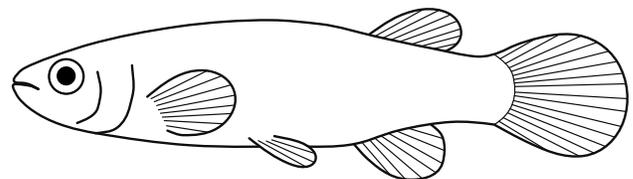
Bluefin killifish (2") — This common minnow is easily told by the brown back and the bold, black stripe down the side which ends in a black spot. The blue fins referred to in the name are visible only on the male during the breeding season. A fair bait for bluegill and the occasional small bass. *Do not confuse with largemouth bass fry which also possess a dark line along the body but have a divided dorsal fin; bass fry must be released immediately if netted.*



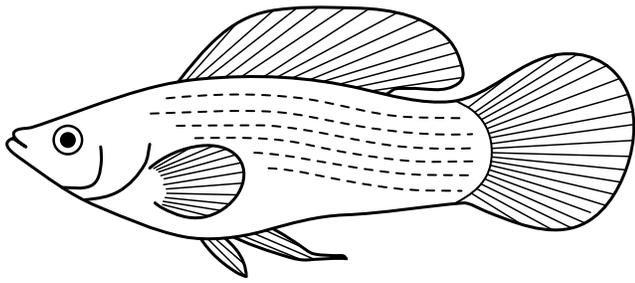
Least killifish (1 ½") — This smallest of our minnows (as its name implies) is light brown in color and is marked by a distinct stripe with vertical bars on the body, and a dark spot on the dorsal and anal fins. Often overlooked—and a poor bait choice—due to its very small size.



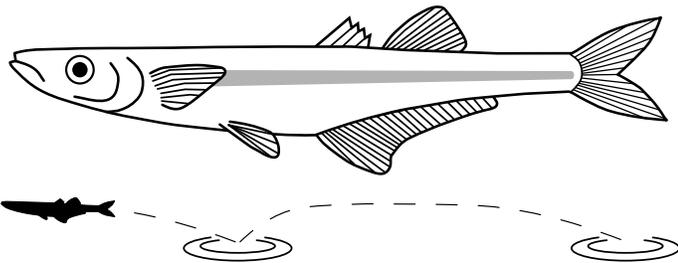
Seminole killifish (6 ½") — A large minnow compared with most of the others shown here, this one is occasionally caught on hook-and-line on such baits as small doughballs, live worms, small jigs or flies. It is very nondescript, but can be told by its bigger size, light greenish color, and rows of fine spots (and faint vertical bars in the case of the female) along the side. It is often seen over open, sandy bottoms near vegetation. Reportedly a fair bait for bass, although the author's own experiences have been unable to prove it.



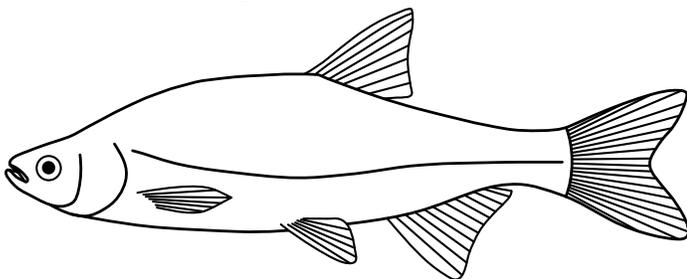
Golden topminnow (3") — This yellowish to greenish minnow is fairly indistinct except for the bright gold "glitter" sprinkled on its upper body. Melanistic (dark-pigmented) varieties may possess black spots scattered over the body as well. As the name implies, this species cruises the surface. A poor bait because it is not as hardy as other minnow species.



Sailfin molly (5") — The male of this aptly-named species is easily recognized by the very large, elongated dorsal fin which may be edged in orange; the male's tail may also be bright orange and blue. However, both sexes can be identified by the five to eight finely dotted lines along the body. Mollies are noticeably larger and less slender than most of our other common minnows. They provide a good bait for bluegill and crappie, with larger individuals useful for tempting bass.

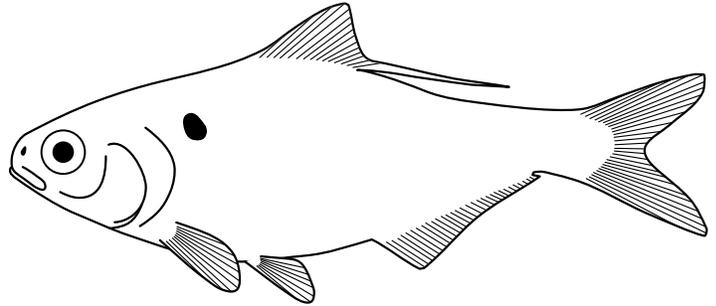


Brook silverside (5") — This elongate and streamlined fish has a beak-like snout and a very distinct silver stripe along its side. Differs from most of these other minnows (except for shad) in that it roams in open water rather than associating with shoreline vegetation. A schooling minnow that can be abundant. Has the habit of swimming just under the surface and occasionally skipping along the top of the water, especially when chased. Not very hardy and therefore a poor bait.

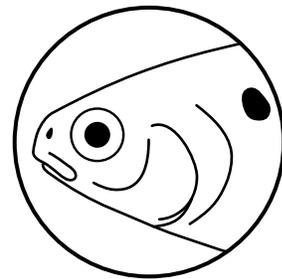


Golden shiner (12") — The golden shiner is a deep-bodied and extremely compressed (flat) fish; also note the strongly down-curved lateral line. A scaleless keel (ridge) is present on the bottom of the belly. The golden color for which the fish is named can be helpful in identification, but is not always present. This is the best all-around bait

for largemouth bass and peacock bass. Shiners can be cast-netted or caught on hook-and-line using tiny (size 12) hooks and doughballs.



Threadfin shad (To 9" though rarely exceeds 6") — An extremely compressed (flat) fish with a distinct dark shoulder spot, long dorsal fin ray, and pointed snout. The body is bright silver, with a dark back. The scales are large in relation to the size of the fish and easily rub off. The threadfin can be told from the gizzard shad because it possesses black specks on the chin and floor of the mouth and yellow fins. A less scientific but nevertheless helpful test is to "scratch" the nose of the shad with a fingernail; if the nail catches and pulls open the bottom jaw it is likely a threadfin. (The threadfin's lower jaw extends out farther than the gizzard shad's.) Although the threadfin shad is an excellent forage and bait for largemouth and sunshine bass, the gizzard shad can quickly grow too large to be preyed upon and can rapidly overpopulate a lake. **Anglers should therefore not transplant any shad to other waters.**



Gizzard shad (To 20" though rarely exceeds 12") — Note the lower jaw which does not extend past the snout (as well as the other features mentioned above) to distinguish this from the threadfin shad. It is also fairly safe to assume that any shad bigger than 6" is a gizzard shad. Small gizzard shad can provide good bass bait, but this species quickly grows too large for even the biggest bass and if it overpopulates can become a serious lake management problem. **Again, never transplant any species of shad to other waters.**