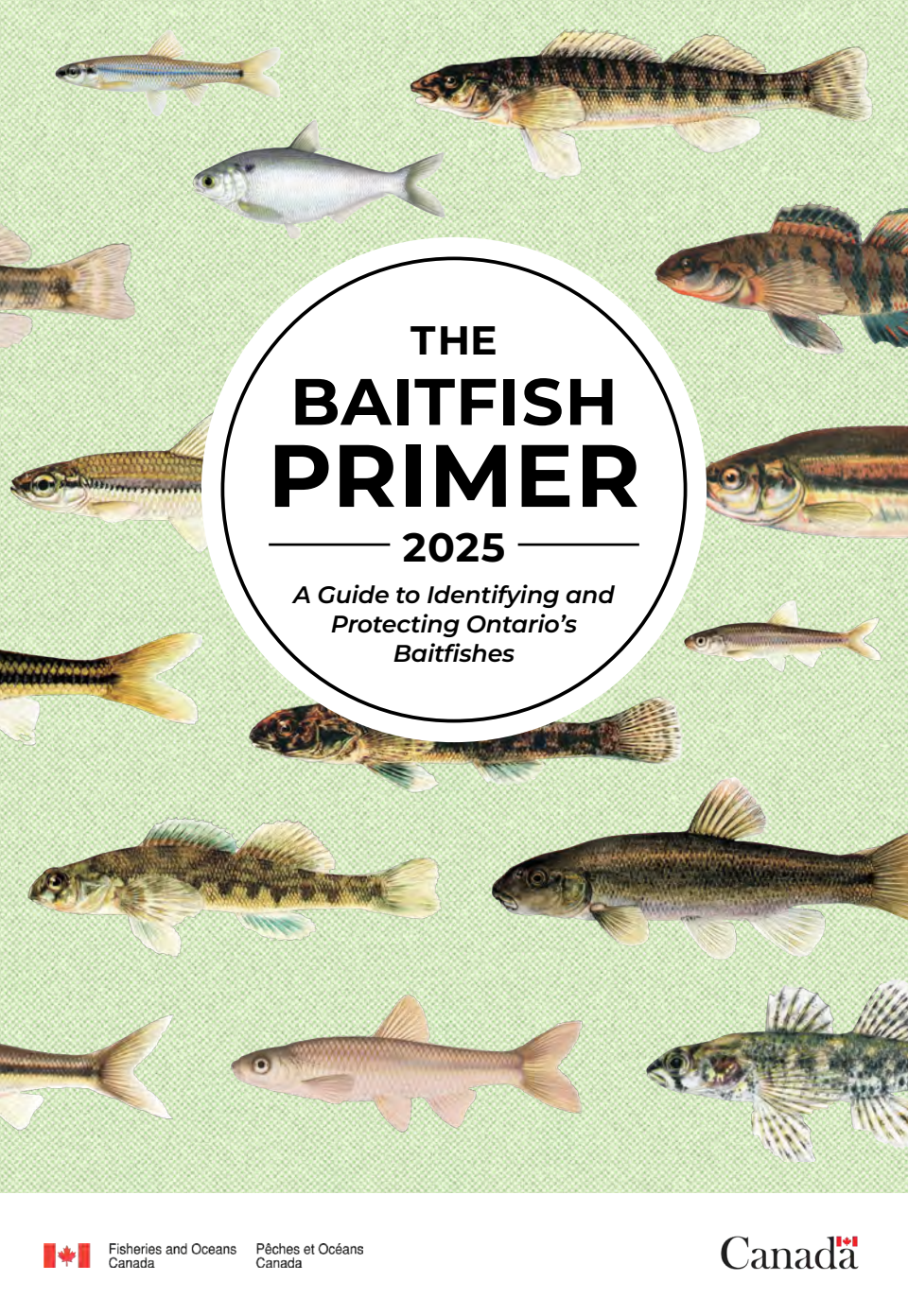




THE BAITFISH PRIMER

— 2025 —

*A Guide to Identifying and
Protecting Ontario's
Baitfishes*



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
Canada

Canada

Written by:
Becky Cudmore and Nicholas E. Mandrak

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Acknowledgements	8
Summary of Legislation Related to Baitfishes	10
Potential Impacts of Harvest and Use of Baitfishes	16
Baitfish Habitat	20
Anatomical Key	22
Pictorial Key of Fish Families in Ontario	24
Species Accounts	30
What You Can Do to Minimize Impacts to Aquatic Ecosystems	76
Further Reading	78

◆ Introduction



Two people wading in a stream seine netting and minnow trapping to collect fish, with three others fishing in the background.

Recreational angling is a popular pastime in Ontario with well over one million residents and visitors enjoying angling every year. Angling supports many aspects of the Ontario economy, including the baitfish industry. Many anglers use live bait, including baitfishes, yet few anglers probably realize that there are over 30 species of legal baitfishes (i.e., fish that can be used live as bait) in Ontario. To many, small fishes can look alike; however, upon closer inspection, most baitfish species can be distinguished from one another with relative ease. If you can tell a House Sparrow apart from a Black-Capped Chickadee, then (with practice) you will soon be able to distinguish a Creek Chub from a Longnose Dace!

The ability to distinguish among small fish species is important, as the use of many species for live bait is illegal. It is illegal to use sport fishes, introduced (i.e., non-native) fishes, or fish species that are so rare that their use may lead to further declines and possible extinction as live bait. Even within fish families generally considered legal baitfishes, there are individual fish species that cannot be used.

Individual fish species may become illegal for baitfish use for various reasons:

- they are listed as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) or the Ontario *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA);
- they are listed as invasive under federal or provincial legislation; and/or,
- they are not included on the allowed baitfish species list in the *Ontario Fishery Regulations, 2007* (OFRs).

Additionally, there are species that require caution for use as baitfishes, as they are species that, although legal, can be easily confused with illegal species.

Most people require a recreational fishing licence or commercial bait harvester licence to legally collect baitfish in Ontario. Areas supporting Extirpated, Endangered, or Threatened species at risk fishes listed on schedule 1 of SARA or identified on national aquatic species at risk maps (<https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/sara-lep/map-carte/index-eng.html>) should be avoided. If any species at risk are encountered during baitfish collection they should immediately be released alive in the location they were found. The commercial baitfish industry in Ontario is comprised of over 900 licensed harvesters and dealers. The bait resource and industry is managed by the province through licensing, legal species lists, log books, annual reporting, and best management practices. In addition, harvesting takes place in prescribed geographic areas and is based on principles intended to protect baitfishes and their habitat into the future.

It is imperative that all commercial and recreational baitfish harvesters are aware of, and adhere to, all federal and provincial laws and regulations pertaining to this activity. In addition, all baitfish users should understand the potential impacts of the careless collection, use, and disposal of baitfishes to minimize or eliminate such impacts.

By the end of this Primer, you will:

- understand the federal and Ontario legislation pertinent to the use of baitfishes;
- be able to identify small fish species;
- be able to distinguish between legal baitfishes and fish species that are illegal to use live as bait;
- recognize the importance of baitfish habitat;
- understand the potential impacts of improper baitfish use; and,
- understand how to minimize negative impacts to our aquatic ecosystems.



Sunset on Lake Ontario, Canada, viewed from the grassy shore towards the water. Trees in the background are lit by the sun under a cloudy, blue sky.

◆ Acknowledgements



Group of six minnows swimming underwater, with sunlight filtering through the blue water.

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Summary of Legislation Related to Baitfishes



Aerial view of a lake and fall forest in Algonquin Park, Ontario, Canada, with orange trees under a blue, cloudy sky.

Ontario Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997

Capture of Baitfishes

Anglers: Residents with a valid recreational fishing licence issued under the *Ontario Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997* (FWCA) may capture their own baitfishes for personal use in the Bait Management Zone where their primary residence is located using traps and dipnets and in accordance with other applicable laws. The OFR allows them to set one baitfish trap (no more than 51 cm × 31 cm; legibly labelled with their name and address) or capture baitfishes with a dipnet (no more than 183 cm in diameter or along each side, and during daylight hours only). The capture and use of bait is not allowed in some waters; the latest version of Ontario's Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary (ontario.ca/document/ontario-fishing-regulations-summary) should be consulted for zone regulations and exceptions. Only baitfishes may be caught for personal use and anglers cannot catch and retain in

any one day, or possess, more than 120 baitfishes, which includes both caught and purchased baitfish. Any live holding box or impounding device must be legibly marked with the name and address of the licence holder, and must be visible without raising it from the water.

Commercial Bait Harvesters:

The taking, transporting, buying, and selling of baitfishes may be authorized under a commercial bait licence issued by the province under the FWCA. The means of taking baitfishes may be specified on the individual commercial bait licence. Licensed harvesters or dealers are required to record harvest and/or maintain receipt of baitfishes in log books and submit annual reports.

Baitfish (and leeches) must be used in the Bait Management Zone in which they were captured and may not be transported into another Bait Management Zone (with a few limited exceptions). Anglers should refer to Ontario's Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary for a complete list of rules related to the use and transport of bait in Ontario.

Use of Baitfishes

Anglers can find a complete up-to-date listing of fish species that can be used live as bait in the OFRs (Species of Baitfish, [Schedule 1, Part 2](#)). Any fish species that are not listed as Species of Baitfish cannot be used live as bait.

Fishes listed as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern under either the federal SARA or the Ontario ESA cannot be used as baitfishes. Invasive species regulated under the OFRs and the *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations* cannot be possessed, transported, or released alive and cannot be

used as bait, regardless of whether they are dead and eviscerated (i.e., gutted). Species considered sport fishes cannot be used live as bait. Crayfishes, salamanders, live fishes, and live leeches cannot be brought into Ontario for use as bait.

It is illegal to (or attempt to) deposit or release any live or dead bait or baitfish (including fish eggs, gametes, or fish parts) or dump the contents of a bait container (including the water, soil, or other materials used to hold any of these items) into, or within 30 m of, any waters.

The Species of Baitfish list, including the legal status of baitfish species, may change over time. Be sure to check the latest version of Ontario's Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary for up-to-date information. Go to ontario.ca/document/ontario-fishing-regulations-summary



View Ontario's Bait Management Zones using the QR code or at <https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-fishing-regulations-summary/bait#section-0>

Federal Fisheries Act

In Canada, the *Fisheries Act* makes it unlawful to carry out any work, undertaking, or activity, other than fishing, that results in the death of fish or any work, undertaking, or activity that results in the harmful alteration, disruption, or destruction of fish habitat.

Website: lois-laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/F-14/

Federal Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations

In May 2015, *Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations* were added to the federal *Fisheries Act* to prevent the importation and spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). Under the regulations, the importation, possession, transport, and release of listed species is prohibited unless they are dead and, in some cases, eviscerated.

Website: laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/sor-2015-121/FullText.html

Federal Species at Risk Act

The federal SARA came into force in June 2004, and aims to protect native wildlife at risk, including fishes, from becoming lost from the wild, to provide for their recovery, and to manage species of Special Concern. Under Section 32 of SARA, general prohibitions apply to fishes designated as Extirpated, Endangered, or Threatened. Fishes designated as such cannot be killed, harmed, harassed, captured, taken, possessed, collected, bought, sold, or traded and the habitat that has been deemed vital to their survival or recovery is also protected. Areas supporting Extirpated, Endangered, or Threatened species at risk fishes listed on schedule 1 of SARA or identified on national aquatic species at risk maps should be avoided. If any species at risk are encountered during baitfish collection they should immediately be released alive in the location they were found. The list of species on schedule 1 of SARA can be accessed on the following website below.

Website: laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/s-15.3/



A fisherman stands waist-deep in a river fly fishing. Green pine trees line the riverbank under a grey sky.

Ontario *Invasive Species Act, 2015*

In November 2016, the provincial *Invasive Species Act, 2015* (ISA) came into force in Ontario. The ISA sets out regulations to prevent and control the spread of invasive species. Species regulated under the Act pose a risk to Ontario's natural environment. There are two classes of invasive species regulated under the Act: prohibited and restricted. It is illegal to import, possess, deposit, release, transport, breed/grow, buy, sell, lease, or trade prohibited invasive species. It is illegal to import, deposit, release, breed/grow, buy, sell, lease, or trade restricted invasive species.

Website: ontario.ca/laws/statute/15i22

Ontario *Endangered Species Act, 2007*

In June 2008, the provincial ESA came into force in Ontario to protect at-risk species and their habitats, to promote the recovery of species that are at risk, and to promote stewardship activities to assist in the protection and recovery of species that are at risk. Endangered, Threatened, or Extirpated species, and their habitats, receive legal protection under the ESA. The Act calls for the creation of recovery strategies for Endangered and Threatened species, and management plans for Special Concern species.

Website: ontario.ca/laws/statute/07e06

Potential Impacts of Harvest and Use of Baitfishes



View through a dipnet resting in a fishing boat, with an orange sunrise in the background.

Harvesting may impact the ecosystems from which baitfishes are taken (termed donor ecosystems) and the ecosystems in which baitfishes are used (termed recipient ecosystems).

Impacts on Donor Ecosystems

Since the early 1900s, there were concerns regarding the depletion of the baitfish supply, followed by concerns about the declining numbers of sport fishes as a result of forage fish depletion. If carried out carelessly, baitfish harvesting may directly alter the abundance of targeted species (i.e., legal species of baitfish) and non-targeted species (i.e., prohibited baitfishes, such as game, invasive, or at-risk species) in the donor ecosystem. Removal of a substantial number of baitfishes could potentially have short- and long-term effects on the abundance of forage fishes. To minimize such impacts, bait harvest areas are assigned to specific commercial licensees who are responsible for managing the resource for

sustainability. Commercial bait harvesters may accomplish this by cycling harvesting locations within their bait harvest area, so that no one location is overharvested. Resident anglers should follow this practice as well to help ensure sustainability of the resource.

Care should be taken to safely return non-targeted species (other than invasive species) to the water immediately. If non-targeted species are not immediately returned, these populations could suffer increased mortality, which may alter species interactions within that ecosystem. Such alterations may result in changes in species composition, increases in invertebrate (e.g., crayfishes) size and abundance, and decreases in productivity, abundance, and growth rates of other fish species (including sport fishes).

Depletions in baitfish populations may also impact native freshwater mussels. Mussels have a complex life cycle that requires attachment

when very young to a host, usually a fish. If large numbers of baitfishes are removed and the number of potential hosts decreases, mussel populations may decline.

The techniques used to harvest baitfishes may impact the habitat that all aquatic organisms (including baitfishes) depend on for the necessities of life. Baitfishes are typically harvested using seine nets or traps. Seining has greater impacts on habitat, as it is an active method that may cause uprooting of aquatic vegetation, removal of woody debris, and disturbance of bottom substrates - all important habitat components required by aquatic organisms for survival.

Traps leave a smaller ecological footprint. This technique is more passive, resulting in smaller disturbance to the surrounding habitat. Many commercial bait harvesters use traps, especially in vegetated areas. Traps and dipnets (which also have minimal impacts) are the only non-angling harvesting methods allowed to be used by resident anglers.

Impacts on Recipient Ecosystems

The impacts of aquatic species (baitfishes and other species) illegally released into recipient ecosystems

have been well documented and can be summarized in four categories.

1. Food-web Changes

Introduced species have been shown to negatively impact food webs - the links between predators (e.g., sport fishes) and prey (e.g., baitfishes). Introduced fishes, such as the Round Goby, can out-compete native species for food and other resources, or even prey on native species and their eggs. These impacts may reduce the abundance of native prey that would, in turn, reduce the abundance of the sport fishes dependent upon these prey species for food.

2. Habitat Changes

The behaviour of introduced species can cause changes to habitat. For example, the destruction of aquatic vegetation and increased turbidity caused by the feeding and spawning of the Common Carp is well documented. Native species relying on that habitat would be greatly impacted by such changes.

3. Introduction of Disease

Diseases and parasites may be transferred to native species through introduced species.

Exposure to these diseases or parasites may lead to decreased abundance of native species. The spread of "whirling disease" from stocked trout to wild trout is an example of this problem. The spread of disease may occur through baitfish transfer; however, the extent and impact of such transfers is not well understood.

4. Genetic Impacts

Native species are well adapted to their environment. Introduced individuals, not adapted to their new environment, may spawn with native individuals of the same species. Their offspring may look the same, but be less adapted to their environment. Introduced individuals may also

spawn with native individuals of closely related species. Their offspring, termed hybrids, may be less adapted to their environment, or may be unable to reproduce. In most cases, spawning between introduced and native species will lead to the decreased abundance of native species.

These impacts are not limited to introduced baitfishes. The water in bait buckets may also carry microscopic invasive species, such as Spiny Waterflea, Fish Hook Waterflea, and Zebra Mussel larvae. These invasive species also have harmful impacts on our aquatic ecosystems.

Anyone with information about suspected illegal activity against Ontario's fish and wildlife is encouraged to call the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources resource violation reporting line at 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667). Violations of our natural resources can lead to conviction and fines.

Anyone finding species that they suspect are invasive should report their finding to the toll-free Invasive Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711. The Hotline is a partnership of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

◆ Baitfish Habitat



A wooden bridge crossing a river in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, with trees and greenery along the banks.

Importance of Baitfish Habitat

Baitfishes, like all fishes, require a place to meet their needs for food, shelter, and reproduction throughout their entire life. Although habitat requirements may be different for each stage in the life cycle of baitfishes, it is important that all needs are met. If, as a result of habitat degradation or loss, one or more of these requirements are not met at any point during their life cycle, their numbers will drop and the population may die out. The abundance of baitfishes is directly related to the quality of their habitat. Therefore, baitfishes can act as indicators of the environmental health of their habitat. A healthy baitfish population provides an important food source for many fish species, including commercial and sport fishes. By providing baitfishes with habitat that includes clean water, adequate food supply, cover, appropriate spawning and rearing grounds, and accessible migration routes, we safeguard these important resources for the baitfish, commercial, and sport industries, and also to help ensure a healthy ecosystem.

Some Threats to Baitfish Habitat

Many of our actions threaten baitfish habitat. For example, agricultural

and forestry activities can affect the quality and quantity of aquatic habitat through damage to in-stream habitat and the introduction of silt and other harmful materials into the water. General construction activities, such as building bridges and culverts, may also affect physical habitat and water quality, as well as impede movement of baitfishes among different habitats.

Other activities along shorelines, such as erosion control projects, marina developments, and vegetation removal, may impact baitfish habitat by altering the natural cover and substrates of shoreline habitat. Changing water levels due to climate change and water-taking activities also directly affect the quality and quantity of baitfish habitat.

Protecting Baitfish Habitat

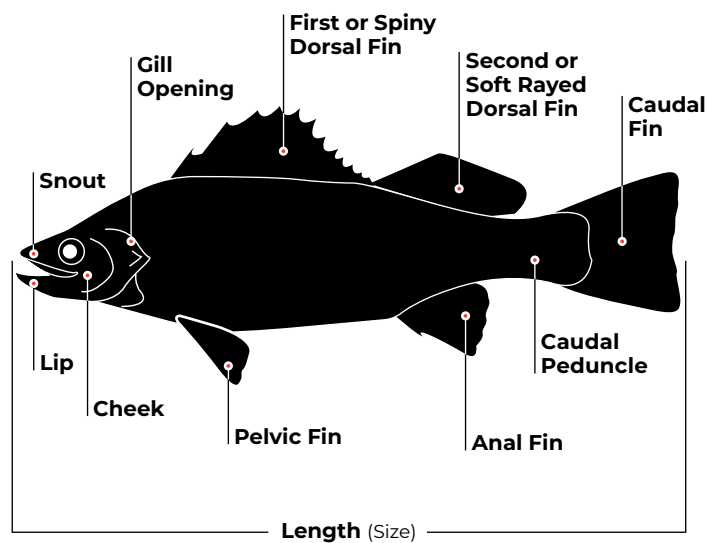
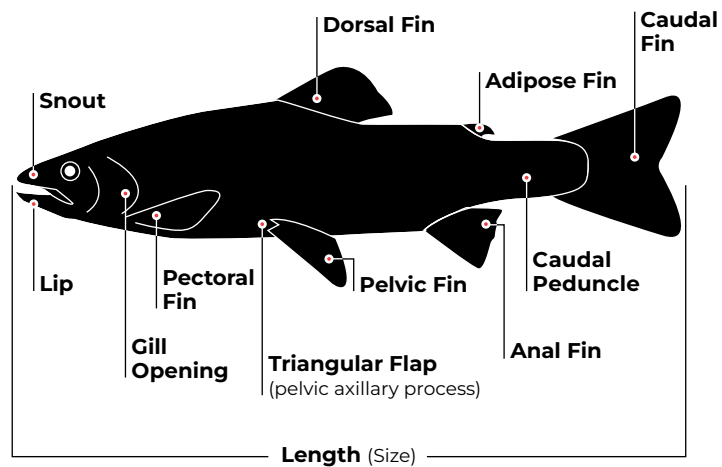
Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has developed a webpage to provide advice and guidelines on environmentally sound practices when working in and around water. The 'Projects Near Water' webpage (dfo-mpo.gc.ca/pnw-ppe/index-eng.html) provides common measures and best practices to avoid, reduce, or eliminate impacts to fishes and fish habitat.

◆ Anatomical Key



A waterfall cascading over rocks at Albion Falls in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

THE BAITFISH PRIMER Anatomical Key



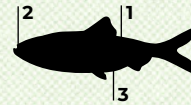
◆ Pictorial Key of Fish Families in Ontario



Georgian Bay shoreline in Ontario, Canada, with green pine trees on grey rocks to the left and vibrant blue water to the right under a light blue sky.

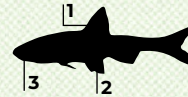
Fish families featured in The Baitfish Primer

◆ **Numbered lines** relate to anatomical features characteristic of the fish family.



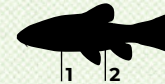
Shads and Thread Herrings (*Alosidae* and *Dorosomatidae*)

- 1. very thin, silvery body
- 2. scaleless head
- 3. belly with saw-toothed edge



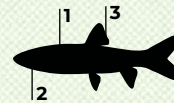
Carps and Minnows (*Cyprinidae* and *Leuciscidae*)

- 1. single dorsal fin
- 2. abdominal pelvic fins
- 3. thin lips



Tenches (*Tincidae*)

- 1. stocky body
- 2. tiny scales



Invasive Carps (*Xenocyprididae*)

- 1. elongate body
- 2. eyes sit low on head
- 3. single, short dorsal fin



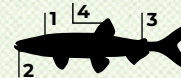
Suckers (*Catostomidae*)

- 1. large, thick lips on short, broad head



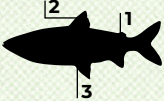
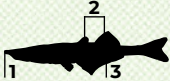
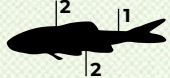
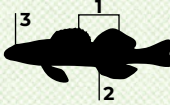
Pikes and Mudminnows (*Esocidae*)

- 1. cylindrical body
- 2. dorsal and anal fins far back on body



Smelts (*Osmeridae*)

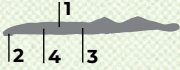
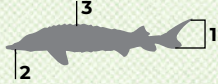
- 1. small, slender, silvery body
- 2. teeth on jaws and tongue
- 3. adipose fin
- 4. no spines

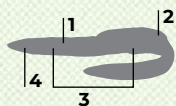
	Trouts and Salmons (<i>Salmonidae</i>) 1. adipose fin 2. no spines 3. small, triangular flap at base of pelvic fin
	New World Silversides (<i>Atherinopsidae</i>) 1. small, upturned mouth on long snout 2. two widely-separated dorsal fins (first very small with spines) 3. long, sickle-shaped anal fin
	Topminnows (<i>Fundulidae</i>) 1. flattened head and back 2. upturned mouth 3. single dorsal fin located far back on body
	Trout-perches (<i>Percopsidae</i>) 1. adipose fin 2. spines on leading edge of dorsal and anal fins
	Sticklebacks (<i>Gasterosteidae</i>) 1. 3-9 isolated dorsal spines in front of dorsal fin 2. extremely narrow caudal peduncle
	Sculpins (<i>Cottidae</i>) 1. 1-4 spines at rear margin of cheek 2. large, fan-like pectoral fins 3. large head 4. body tapering to narrow caudal peduncle
	Perches and Darters (<i>Percidae</i>) 1. two separate dorsal fins – first with spines, second with rays 2. 1-2 spines on leading edge of small anal fin 3. single, flat spine at rear margin of cheek
	Gobies (<i>Gobiidae</i>) 1. pelvic fins fused to form suction cup
	Crayfishes (<i>Cambaridae</i>)

Fish families not featured in The Baitfish Primer

as there are no members considered legal baitfish. Members of these fish families can be easily distinguished from legal baitfishes.

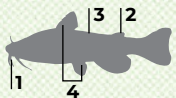
◆ Numbered lines relate to anatomical features characteristic of the fish family.

	Lampreys (<i>Petromyzontidae</i>) 1. scaleless body 2. round, disc-like mouth without jaws 3. no pectoral or pelvic fins 4. seven pairs of gill openings
	Sturgeons (<i>Acipenseridae</i>) 1. upper lobe of caudal fin longer than lower lobe 2. two pairs of fleshy barbels before mouth under shovel-shaped snout 3. large, bony plates on head, along back and side
	Gars (<i>Lepisosteidae</i>) 1. long, slender, cylindrical body with diamond-shaped, armour-like scales 2. long, slender snout with needle-like teeth 3. dorsal and anal fins far back on body
	Bowfins (<i>Amiidae</i>) 1. long, spineless dorsal fin 2. rounded caudal fin 3. large, bony plate underneath lower jaw
	Mooneyes (<i>Hiodontidae</i>) 1. large eyes far forward on scaleless head 2. forked caudal fin 3. mouth with teeth



Freshwater Eels (*Anguillidae*)

1. long, thin body
2. long dorsal fin joined to caudal and anal fins
3. pectoral and pelvic fins present
4. single pair of small gill openings



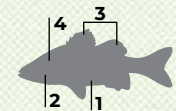
North American Catfishes (*Ictaluridae*)

1. four pairs of whisker-like barbels around mouth
2. adipose fin
3. scaleless body
4. spines leading pectoral and dorsal fins



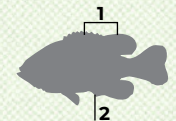
Cods (*Gadidae*)

1. short barbel at tip of chin
2. long dorsal and anal fins
3. tiny scales



Temperate Basses (*Moronidae*)

1. thin, deep body
2. large spine on gill cover
3. two distinct or slightly joined dorsal fins
4. silvery body



Sunfishes and Basses (*Centrarchidae*)

1. two broadly joined dorsal fins - first with spines, second with rays
2. 3-9 spines on leading edge of anal fin



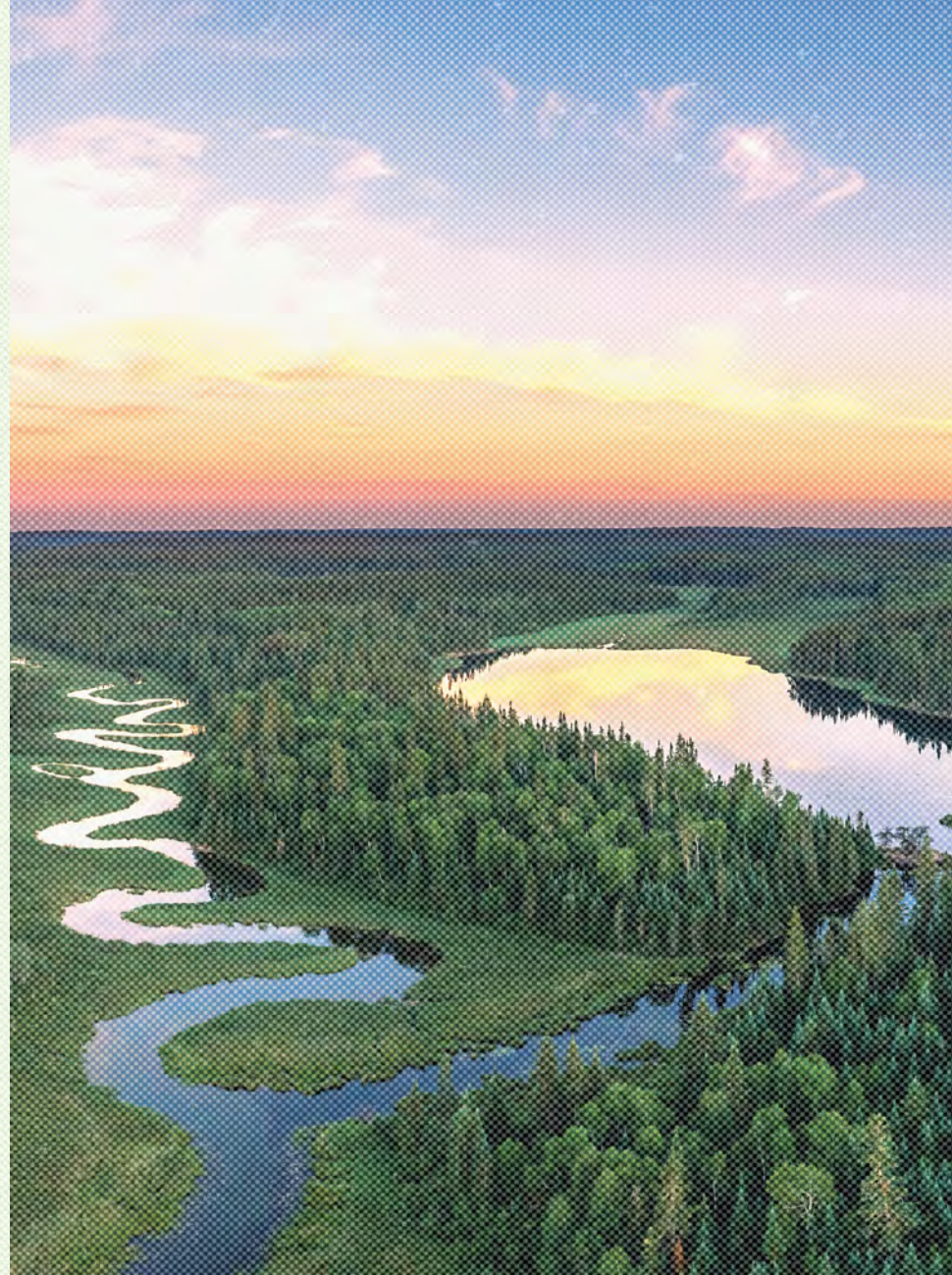
Drums and Croakers (*Sciaenidae*)

1. two dorsal fins - first with spines but shorter than second
2. lateral line extends to posterior end of caudal fin
3. deep body, highly-arched at first dorsal fin origin



Flathead Sculpins (*Psychrolutidae*)

1. large, fan-like pectoral fins
2. disk-like tubercles on upper sides
3. large head with body tapering to narrow caudal peduncle



Aerial view of a meandering watercourse in northwestern Ontario, Canada. Green pine trees surround the water, with a colourful sunset above.

◆ Species Accounts



View from a rocky cliff in Killarney Provincial Park, Ontario, Canada.
The sun reflects on the water beneath blue skies and scattered clouds.

Species are grouped by evolutionary order of families, followed by groups of similar-looking species within families.

The following information is presented in the species accounts (modified from Holm et al. 2010):

- **Characteristics:** anatomical features used to distinguish species from similar species
- **Size:** Ontario average; Ontario record
- **Similar species:** other species with which the species may be confused
- **Ontario distribution:** general distribution in Ontario
- **Habitat:** brief description of habitat used by the species
- **Use as bait:** description of use as bait if it is a legal baitfish, or the reason for its prohibited or cautionary use
- The species are also labeled as **Legal, Caution, or Illegal** based on the following criteria:

LEGAL: listed in the OFRs as a species that can be used live as bait and one that is not easily confused with illegal species.

CAUTION: while not illegal, its use is considered cautionary, as it may be easily confused with illegal species.

◆ **ILLEGAL:** the use of the species is prohibited as:

- it is listed as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened, or of Special Concern under the federal SARA or the Ontario ESA;
- it is not listed as a Species of Baitfish under the OFRs; or
- it is listed as an invasive species in federal or provincial legislation.

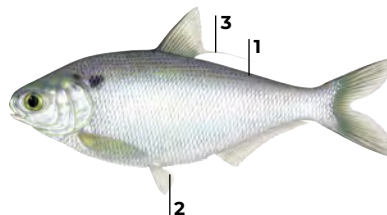


Alewife

(*Alosa pseudoharengus*)

Characteristics:	1. very laterally compressed body; 2. belly with saw-toothed edge; 3. large eye; 4. large mouth
Size:	150 mm; 309 mm
Similar species:	Gizzard Shad
Ontario distribution:	introduced throughout the Great Lakes
Habitat:	open water
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; introduced

ILLEGAL

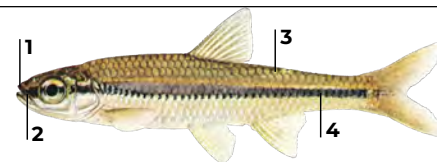


Gizzard Shad

(*Dorosoma cepedianum*)

Characteristics:	1. very deep and laterally compressed body; 2. saw-toothed keel along belly; 3. very long last ray on dorsal fin
Size:	250 mm; 525 mm
Similar species:	Alewife; juvenile Bighead Carp and Silver Carp
Ontario distribution:	southern Ontario
Habitat:	cool, nearshore waters in the pelagic zone of the Great Lakes as well as turbid, vegetated tributaries
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL

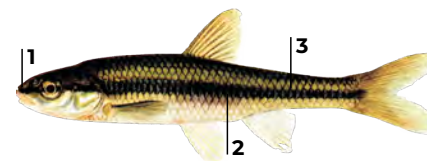


Blackchin Shiner

(*Miniellus heterodon*)

Characteristics:	1. upturned mouth; 2. black pigment on snout and chin; 3. scales darkly outlined; 4. black stripe along side has zig-zag appearance
Size:	56 mm; 73 mm
Similar species:	Blacknose Shiner, Bridle Shiner, Pugnose Minnow, Pugnose Shiner
Ontario distribution:	central and northern Ontario, limited in southern Ontario
Habitat:	vegetated, nearshore areas of lakes and small rivers
Use as bait:	occasionally sold mixed with other shiners; CAUTION: similar physical appearance to several at-risk fishes

CAUTION

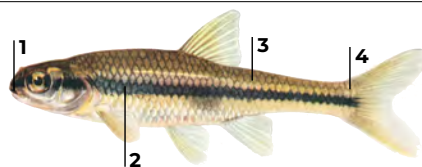


Blacknose Shiner

(*Notropis heterolepis*)

Characteristics:	1. black stripe around snout, barely onto upper lip and not on chin; 2. black crescents within stripe along side; 3. scales darkly outlined except above dark stripe along silver side
Size:	74 mm; 95 mm
Similar species:	Blackchin Shiner, Bridle Shiner, Pugnose Minnow, Pugnose Shiner
Ontario distribution:	central and northern Ontario, limited in southern Ontario
Habitat:	cool, clear, weedy streams and shallow bays of lakes with sand or gravel bottom
Use as bait:	sold mixed with other shiners; CAUTION: similar physical appearance to several at-risk fishes

CAUTION

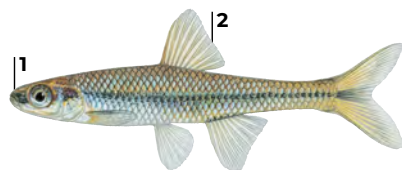


Bridle Shiner

(Notropis bifrenatus)

Characteristics:	1. small, upturned mouth; 2. brown-black stripe along side and around snout; 3. scales darkly outlined; 4. usually black spot at base of caudal fin
Size:	50 mm; 59 mm
Similar species:	Blackchin Shiner, Blacknose Shiner, Pugnose Minnow, Pugnose Shiner
Ontario distribution:	southeastern Ontario
Habitat:	clear, still, shallow streams, ponds, or lakes with submerged aquatic vegetation and bottom is mud, silt, or sand
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Special Concern under SARA and the ESA

ILLEGAL



Pugnose Minnow

(Opsopoeodus emiliae)

Characteristics:	1. small, strongly upturned mouth; 2. two very dark areas (front and rear) on dorsal fin in breeding males
Size:	50 mm; 57 mm
Similar species:	Blackchin Shiner, Blacknose Shiner, Bridle Shiner, Pugnose Shiner
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	slow moving waters of turbid, small to large streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Threatened under SARA and the ESA

ILLEGAL



Pugnose Shiner

(Miniellus anogenus)

Characteristics:	1. very small, upturned mouth; 2. black pigment on chin, lower lip, side of upper lip; 3. scales darkly outlined; 4. dark stripe along side
Size:	50 mm; 56 mm
Similar species:	Blackchin Shiner, Blacknose Shiner, Bridle Shiner, Pugnose Minnow
Ontario distribution:	isolated populations in southwestern Ontario and the St. Lawrence River
Habitat:	clear, heavily vegetated lakes, and pools of vegetated streams and rivers with clean sand or mud bottoms
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Threatened under SARA and the ESA

ILLEGAL



Western Blacknose Dace

(Rhinichthys obtusus)

Characteristics:	1. thin barbel in corner of mouth; 2. no groove separating snout from upper lip; 3. pointed snout slightly overhangs mouth; 4. stripe along side, through eye, and onto snout
Size:	64 mm; 100 mm
Similar species:	Longnose Dace
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	small, cool, clear, fast streams with rocky or gravelly substrate
Use as bait:	used to a limited extent in Ontario; considered a relatively hardy species

LEGAL

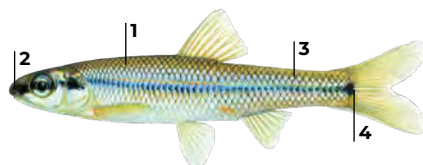


Longnose Dace

(Rhinichthys cataractae)

Characteristics:	1. thin barbel in corner of mouth; 2. no groove separating snout from upper lip; 3. long, fleshy snout extends beyond mouth
Size:	75 mm; 152 mm
Similar species:	Western Blacknose Dace
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	clean, swift streams with gravel beds, occasionally taken in inshore waters of lakes
Use as bait:	not commonly used, possibly because of its drab colouration and its intolerance of the still water of bait buckets

LEGAL



Bluntnose Minnow

(Pimephales notatus)

Characteristics:	1. crowded scales between head and dorsal fin; 2. blunt snout overhanging small mouth; 3. scales darkly outlined (often with cross-hatched appearance); 4. conspicuous black spot on caudal fin base
Size:	65 mm; 101 mm
Similar species:	Fathead Minnow
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	main river channels over substrate of silt, sand, gravel, or rocks; avoids heavy vegetation
Use as bait:	not a popular species as it does not withstand crowding in a bait bucket as well as other species

LEGAL

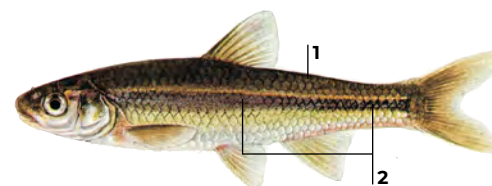


Fathead Minnow

(Pimephales promelas)

Characteristics:	1. crowded scales between head and dorsal fin; 2. blunt snout with slanted mouth; 3. head short, flat on top
Size:	50 mm; 101 mm
Similar species:	Bluntnose Minnow
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	found in a wide range of habitats, but generally prefers still waters
Use as bait:	angler preference varies locally; transports and holds well in commercial tanks and bait buckets

LEGAL

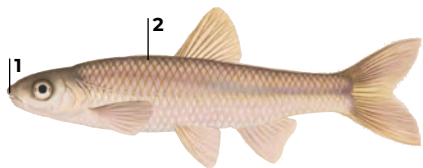


Brassy Minnow

(Hybognathus hankinsoni)

Characteristics:	1. brassy-yellow body; 2. diffuse dusky stripe, developed on rear half of side
Size:	65 mm; 96 mm
Similar species:	Eastern Silvery Minnow
Ontario distribution:	widespread in southern and northwestern Ontario
Habitat:	small, sluggish, weedy streams with sand, gravel, or mud bottom covered by organic sediment; also common in silt-bottomed, shallow bog ponds, streams, and lakes
Use as bait:	not commonly used

LEGAL



Eastern Silvery Minnow (*Hybognathus regius*)

Characteristics:	1. small, slightly subterminal mouth, rounded snout; 2. body deepest and widest in front of dorsal fin
Size:	75 mm; 108 mm
Similar species:	Brassy Minnow
Ontario distribution:	southeastern Ontario
Habitat:	pools and backwaters of medium- to large-sized streams with sandy bottoms
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

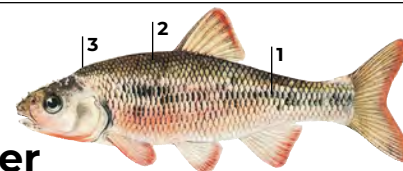
ILLEGAL



Central Stoneroller (*Campostoma anomalum*)

Characteristics:	1. hard ridge along edge of lower jaw; 2. some speckling on sides
Size:	100 mm; 150 mm
Similar species:	none
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario, introduced in other parts of southern Ontario
Habitat:	small- to medium-sized streams with moderate, sometimes fast current and gravel to rock bottoms with attached filamentous algae
Use as bait:	occasionally used, becoming more common

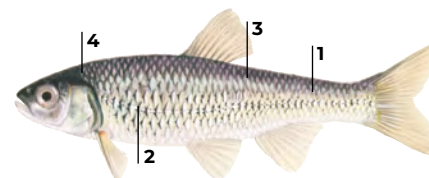
LEGAL



Common Shiner (*Luxilus cornutus*)

Characteristics:	1. large scales, much deeper than wide; 2. dark stripe along middle of back; 3. crowded scales between head and dorsal fin
Size:	83 mm; 180 mm
Similar species:	Striped Shiner
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	small- to medium-sized weedless streams with gravel to rubble bottom, and nearshore of lakes
Use as bait:	commonly used as a bait species - its large size and silvery appearance make it particularly attractive; transports and holds well in commercial tanks but does not live long in bait buckets

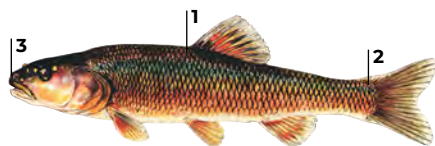
LEGAL



Striped Shiner (*Luxilus chrysocephalus*)

Characteristics:	1. large scales, much deeper than wide; 2. relatively deep body; 3. dark stripes on upper sides meet at middle of back behind dorsal fin to form large V's; 4. scales between head and dorsal fin not crowded
Size:	129 mm; 238 mm
Similar species:	Common Shiner
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	weedless, medium-sized streams with alternating pools and riffles over a gravel or rubble bottom, often with some silt
Use as bait:	not known

LEGAL



Creek Chub

(Semotilus atromaculatus)

Characteristics:	1. large black spot at front of dorsal fin base; 2. black caudal spot (not obvious in large individuals); 3. black stripe along side, around snout, and onto upper lip
Size:	100 mm; 297 mm
Similar species:	Fallfish, Hornyhead Chub, Lake Chub, River Chub
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	small, clear streams; nearshore of small lakes
Use as bait:	one of the most important bait minnows as it is hardy, grows to a large size, and can be readily caught in most streams

LEGAL



Fallfish

(Semotilus corporalis)

Characteristics:	1. small, thick barbel in groove above corner of mouth; 2. scales on back and upper side darkly outlined
Size:	170 mm; 470 mm
Similar species:	Creek Chub, Hornyhead Chub, Lake Chub, River Chub
Ontario distribution:	eastern Ontario
Habitat:	clear, flowing, gravel-bottomed streams; lakes
Use as bait:	limited use

LEGAL



Hornyhead Chub

(Nocomis biguttatus)

Characteristics:	1. thin barbel at corner of large mouth; 2. large, dark-edged scales; 3. spot on base of tail
Size:	90 mm; 160 mm
Similar species:	Creek Chub, Fallfish, Lake Chub, River Chub
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario, introduced elsewhere
Habitat:	small- to medium-sized clear streams with gravel bottoms
Use as bait:	not important as a bait species in Ontario, probably due to limited distribution and may not be distinguished from the more common Creek Chub; highly regarded in the northern US, especially for Northern Pike; attains large size, is hardy, and can withstand handling in commercial storage tanks and bait buckets

LEGAL



River Chub

(Nocomis micropogon)

Characteristics:	1. thin barbel at corner of large mouth; 2. large, dark-edged scales; 3. no spot on tail
Size:	100 mm; 256 mm
Similar species:	Creek Chub, Fallfish, Hornyhead Chub, Lake Chub
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario, introduced elsewhere
Habitat:	medium-sized streams with gravel to boulder substrates
Use as bait:	when used as a baitfish, it may not be distinguished from the more common Creek Chub

LEGAL



Lake Chub

(Couesius plumbeus)

Characteristics:	1. thin barbel at corner of large mouth; 2. large pectoral fins; 3. lead-coloured sides and back
Size:	100 mm; 207 mm
Similar species:	Creek Chub, Fallfish, Hornyhead Chub, River Chub
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	gravel-bottomed pools and runs of streams; lakes
Use as bait:	limited use as live bait in Lake Trout fishing in the vicinity of Rosspport, Lake Superior; spring spawning runs fished by bait harvesters for Walleye bait

LEGAL

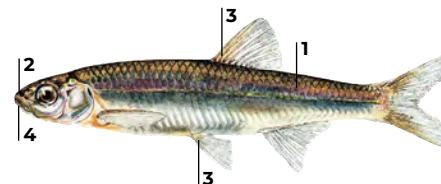


Cutlip Minnow

(Exoglossum maxillingua)

Characteristics:	1. fleshy lobe on each side of lower jaw
Size:	100 mm; 140 mm
Similar species:	none
Ontario distribution:	southeastern Ontario
Habitat:	warm, clear, gravelly streams and rivers relatively free of vegetation and silt; dwells mostly under stones in quiet pools
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Special Concern under SARA and Threatened under the ESA

ILLEGAL

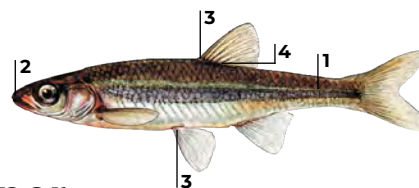


Emerald Shiner

(Notropis atherinoides)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. large mouth on fairly pointed snout; 3. dorsal fin origin behind pelvic fin origin; 4. black lips (front half)
Size:	75 mm; 124 mm
Similar species:	Rosyface Shiner, Silver Shiner
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	common in large rivers and lakes
Use as bait:	very popular baitfish, particularly for ice fishing; most important commercial baitfish in Ontario; CAUTION: similar appearance to at-risk Silver Shiner

CAUTION

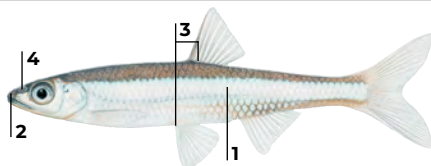


Rosyface Shiner

(Notropis rubellus)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. large mouth on sharply pointed, long snout; 3. dorsal fin origin well behind pelvic fin origin; 4. faint red at base of dorsal fin
Size:	65 mm; 87 mm
Similar species:	Emerald Shiner, Silver Shiner
Ontario distribution:	southern Ontario
Habitat:	clear, fast-flowing, small- to medium-sized streams with bottoms of fine gravel or rubble; usually in or around riffles
Use as bait:	not readily kept in commercial tanks; CAUTION: similar appearance to at-risk Silver Shiner

CAUTION



Silver Shiner

(Notropis photogenis)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. large mouth on long snout; 3. dorsal fin origin over pelvic fin; 4. two black crescents between nostrils
Size:	100 mm; 143 mm
Similar species:	Emerald Shiner, Rosyface Shiner
Ontario distribution:	isolated populations in southern Ontario
Habitat:	clear, weedless, medium- to large-sized streams with clean gravel or boulder bottoms; usually in riffles and runs
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Threatened under SARA and the ESA

ILLEGAL



Finescale Dace

(Chrosomus neogaeus)

Characteristics:	1. very small scales; 2. mouth extending to under eye; 3. single black stripe along side
Size:	75 mm; 106 mm
Similar species:	Northern Redbelly Dace, Northern Pearl Dace
Ontario distribution:	central and northern Ontario, limited in southern Ontario
Habitat:	tea-stained, cool, small, boggy streams and lakes usually over silt and near vegetation; often common in beaver ponds
Use as bait:	widely distributed and often abundant baitfish

LEGAL



Northern Redbelly Dace

(Chrosomus eos)

Characteristics:	1. very small scales; 2. small mouth; 3. two black stripes along side
Size:	55 mm; 82 mm
Similar species:	Finescale Dace, Northern Pearl Dace
Ontario distribution:	widespread in central and northern Ontario, limited in southern Ontario
Habitat:	quiet, boggy streams, ponds, and small lakes over a bottom of organic muck and vegetation
Use as bait:	generally considered too small for a bait minnow but is hardy and readily available in less populated areas of Ontario, where it is used for bait

LEGAL

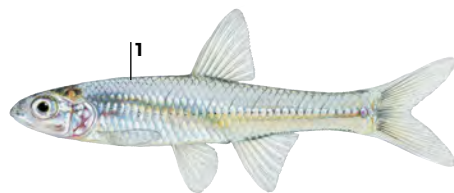


Northern Pearl Dace

(Margariscus nachtriebi)

Characteristics:	1. very small scales; 2. small mouth; 3. barbel in groove above lip (often missing on one or both sides); 4. many small black and brown specks on silver side
Size:	90 mm; 160 mm
Similar species:	Finescale Dace, Northern Redbelly Dace
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	boggy streams, ponds, and small lakes with sand or gravel bottoms
Use as bait:	in many areas it is an important bait minnow, but is usually unrecognized and included with other species sold as chub or dace

LEGAL

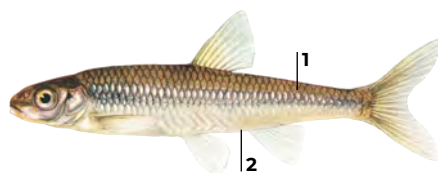


Ghost Shiner

(*Paranotropis buechanani*)

Characteristics:	1. body translucent, milky-white overall in colour
Size:	48 mm; 58 mm
Similar species:	Mimic Shiner, Sand Shiner, River Shiner
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	quiet waters of large streams and lakes with clean sand, gravel bottoms, and some aquatic vegetation
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL

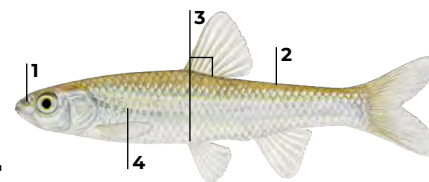


Mimic Shiner

(*Paranotropis volucellus*)

Characteristics:	1. lateral band weakly pigmented; 2. black pigment surrounding anus
Size:	60 mm; 82 mm
Similar species:	Ghost Shiner, Sand Shiner, River Shiner
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	quiet or still waters of streams and lakes
Use as bait:	common; usually captured incidentally while harvesting other baitfishes, such as Emerald Shiner; CAUTION: similar in appearance to illegal Ghost Shiner and River Shiner

CAUTION

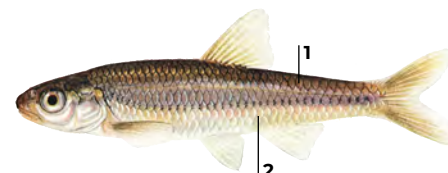


River Shiner

(*Alburnops blennius*)

Characteristics:	1. rounded snout overhangs mouth; 2. uniform dark stripe along back; 3. dorsal fin origin directly over pelvic fin origin; 4. mostly silvery with small, dark pigment on sides
Size:	75 mm; 97 mm
Similar species:	Ghost Shiner, Mimic Shiner, Sand Shiner
Ontario distribution:	northwestern Ontario, Rainy River, and Lake-of-the-Woods
Habitat:	pools and main channels of medium to large rivers, low to moderate velocities, silt and gravel substrates
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL



Sand Shiner

(*Miniellus stramineus*)

Characteristics:	1. lateral band weakly pigmented; 2. no black pigment surrounding anus
Size:	65 mm; 85 mm
Similar species:	Ghost Shiner, Mimic Shiner, River Shiner
Ontario distribution:	southern Ontario
Habitat:	sandy shallows of small- to large-sized rivers and lakes with some rooted aquatic plants
Use as bait:	transports and holds well in commercial tanks, can withstand low oxygen conditions; CAUTION: similar in appearance to illegal Ghost Shiner and River Shiner

CAUTION

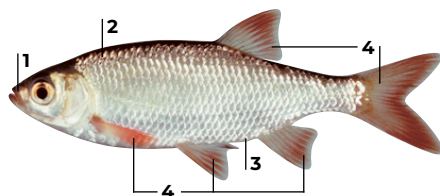


Golden Shiner

(Notemigonus crysoleucas)

Characteristics:	1. small, upturned mouth; 2. deep-bodied but very thin; 3. scaleless keel along belly from pelvic to anal fin
Size:	100 mm; 204 mm
Similar species:	Rudd
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	clear, weedy, quiet waters of streams and lakes
Use as bait:	one of the most popular of all baitfishes in North America (including Ontario); easily damaged by handling; CAUTION: very similar in appearance to illegal Rudd

CAUTION

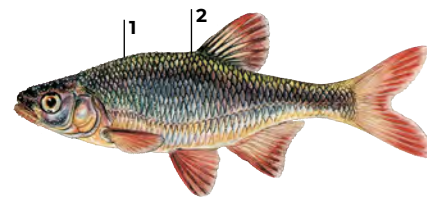


Rudd

(Scardinius erythrophthalmus)

Characteristics:	1. small, upturned mouth; 2. deep-bodied but very thin; 3. scaled keel along belly from pelvic to anal fin; 4. bright red anal, pelvic, and pectoral fins, red-brown dorsal and caudal fins
Size:	200 mm; 395 mm
Similar species:	Golden Shiner
Ontario distribution:	isolated, introduced populations in southern Ontario
Habitat:	clear, weedy, quiet waters of streams and lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; invasive species

ILLEGAL

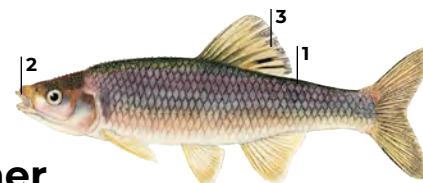


Redfin Shiner

(Lythrurus umbratilis)

Characteristics:	1. very small scales in front of dorsal fin; 2. dark spot at dorsal fin origin
Size:	60 mm; 73 mm
Similar species:	Spotfin Shiner
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	quiet waters of creeks and small- to medium-sized rivers with some vegetation
Use as bait:	generally considered too small and uncommon in Ontario to be used as baitfish

LEGAL



Spotfin Shiner

(Cyprinella spiloptera)

Characteristics:	1. scales on side diamond-shaped (taller than wide); 2. dusky to black bar on chin; 3. black spot on rear half of dorsal fin
Size:	75 mm; 115 mm
Similar species:	Redfin Shiner
Ontario distribution:	southern Ontario
Habitat:	medium- to large-sized, unvegetated streams over sand, gravel, or rubble, often in somewhat turbid waters
Use as bait:	can be used as a baitfish but of no real importance in Ontario due to limited distribution; not readily kept in tanks

LEGAL



Silver Chub

(*Macrhybopsis storeriana*)

Characteristics:	1. rounded snout overhanging mouth; 2. barbel in corner of mouth; 3. no spot on caudal peduncle
Size:	120 mm; 225 mm
Similar species:	Spottail Shiner
Ontario distribution:	Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair
Habitat:	shallow areas of Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; Great Lakes-upper St. Lawrence populations listed as Endangered under SARA and Threatened under the ESA

ILLEGAL



Spottail Shiner

(*Hudsonius hudsonius*)

Characteristics:	1. rounded snout overhanging mouth; 2. no barbel; 3. large black caudal spot
Size:	90 mm; 142 mm
Similar species:	Silver Chub
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	large streams and lakes, usually over sandy or rocky shallows with sparse vegetation
Use as bait:	most frequently used bait minnow in many parts of northern and eastern Ontario

LEGAL



Gravel Chub

(*Erimystax x-punctatus*)

Characteristics:	1. small, thin barbel in corner of mouth; 2. many dark X's on back and side
Size:	75 mm; 94 mm
Similar species:	Creek Chub, Fallfish, Hornyhead Chub, Lake Chub, River Chub
Ontario distribution:	only known from the Thames River in the 1950's
Habitat:	gravel-bottomed, small- to large-sized streams, preferably slow moving and deep
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Extirpated under SARA and the ESA

ILLEGAL

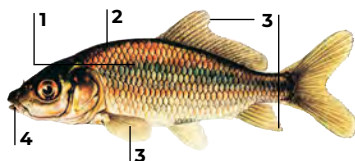


Redside Dace

(*Clinostomus elongatus*)

Characteristics:	1. long, pointed snout with very large mouth; 2. bright red stripe on lower side
Size:	75 mm; 109 mm
Similar species:	Finescale Dace, Northern Redbelly Dace, Northern Pearl Dace
Ontario distribution:	isolated populations throughout southern Ontario and Sault Ste. Marie
Habitat:	clear, cool, flowing streams over rubble or gravel substrate
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Endangered under SARA and the ESA

ILLEGAL

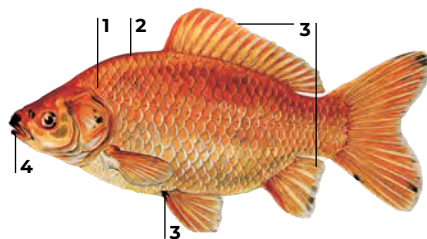


Common Carp

(Cyprinus carpio)

Characteristics:	1. large scales; 2. deep, thick body, strongly arched to dorsal fin, flattened behind; 3. saw-toothed spine at front of dorsal, pectoral, and anal fins; 4. two barbels on each side of upper jaw
Size:	370 mm; 1041 mm
Similar species:	Goldfish; Grass Carp; Tench
Ontario distribution:	introduced throughout southern Ontario, isolated populations in northern Ontario
Habitat:	wide variety of habitats, in small- to large-sized streams, nearshore of lakes over all types of substrates
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; introduced

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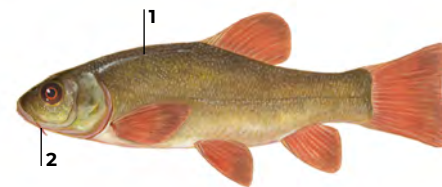


Goldfish

(Carassius auratus)

Characteristics:	1. large scales; 2. deep, thick body, strongly arched to dorsal fin; 3. saw-toothed spine at front of dorsal, pectoral, and anal fins; 4. no barbels
Size:	190 mm; 393 mm
Similar species:	Common Carp; Tench
Ontario distribution:	introduced throughout southwestern Ontario, isolated populations elsewhere
Habitat:	wide variety of habitats, in small to large streams, nearshore of lakes over all types of substrates
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; introduced

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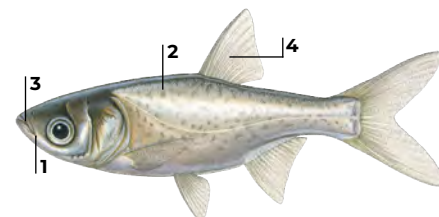


Tench

(Tinca tinca)

Characteristics:	1. very small scales; 2. one barbel on each side of upper jaw
Size:	250 mm; 465 mm
Similar species:	Common Carp, Goldfish; Lake Chubsucker
Ontario distribution:	potential invader
Habitat:	shallow, muddy, vegetated ponds, lakes, and streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs and the ISA

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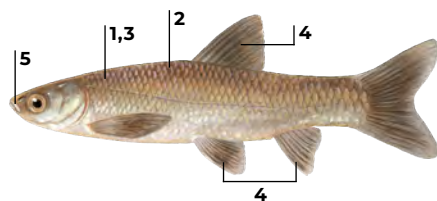


Bighead Carp

(Hypophthalmichthys nobilis)

Characteristics:	1. eye sits below the mouth; 2. small scales with dark blotches; 3. no barbels; 4. no long last ray on dorsal fin
Size:	to 1500 mm
Similar species:	Silver Carp; Gizzard Shad
Ontario distribution:	potential invader
Habitat:	wide variety of habitats in large streams and lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs, ISA, and federal AIS regulations

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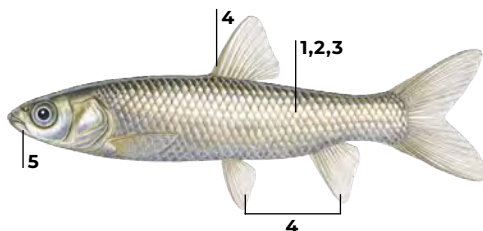


Black Carp

(Mylopharyngodon piceus)

Characteristics:	1. large scales; 2. thick body, not deep; 3. large, dark-edged scales; 4. no spines on dorsal, pectoral, and anal fins; 5. no barbels
Size:	to 1500 mm
Similar species:	Grass Carp; Goldfish; Tench
Ontario distribution:	potential invader
Habitat:	wide variety of habitats in large streams and lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs, ISA, and federal AIS regulations

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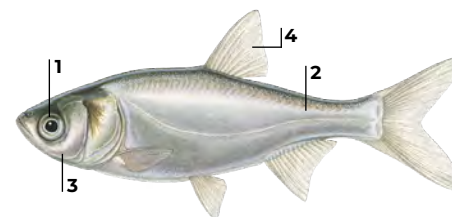


Grass Carp

(Ctenopharyngodon idella)

Characteristics:	1. large scales; 2. thick body, not deep; 3. large, dark-edged scales; 4. no spines on dorsal, pectoral, and anal fins; 5. no barbels
Size:	to 1500 mm
Similar species:	Black Carp; Common Carp, Goldfish; Tench; Fallfish
Ontario distribution:	isolated individuals introduced in southern Ontario
Habitat:	wide variety of habitats in large streams and nearshore of lakes, typically with aquatic vegetation
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs, ISA, and federal AIS regulations

ILLEGAL



Silver Carp

(Hypophthalmichthys molitrix)

Characteristics:	1. eye sits below the mouth; 2. small, shiny scales; 3. no barbels; 4. no long last ray on dorsal fin
Size:	to 1500 mm
Similar species:	Bighead Carp; Gizzard Shad
Ontario distribution:	potential invader
Habitat:	wide variety of habitats in large streams and lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs, ISA, and federal AIS regulations

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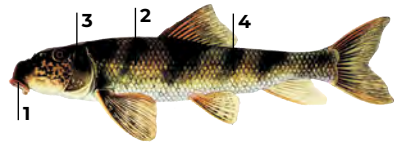


Longnose Sucker

(Catostomus catostomus)

Characteristics:	1. thick lips with many 'pimples'; 2. very small scales
Size:	335 mm; 505 mm
Similar species:	Northern Hog Sucker, White Sucker
Ontario distribution:	Great Lakes, central and northern Ontario
Habitat:	cold, deep lakes
Use as bait:	only incidental; caught rarely with small White Suckers

LEGAL



Northern Hog Sucker

(Hypentelium nigricans)

Characteristics:	1. thick lips with 'pimples'; 2. large scales; 3. large, rectangular head, broadly flat (young) or concave (adult) between eyes; 4. 3-6 dusky-brown saddles on upper side
Size:	190 mm; 380 mm
Similar species:	Longnose Sucker, White Sucker
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	riffles and adjacent pools of clear, shallow streams with gravel to rubble substrates; found infrequently in shallow lakes near the mouths of streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

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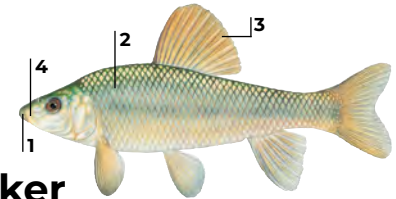


White Sucker

(Catostomus commersonii)

Characteristics:	1. thick lips (lower lip about twice as thick as upper lip) with many "pimples"; 2. small scales
Size:	410 mm; 589 mm
Similar species:	Longnose Sucker, Northern Hog Sucker
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	found in a wide range of habitats
Use as bait:	widespread; often sold as "pike" bait

LEGAL

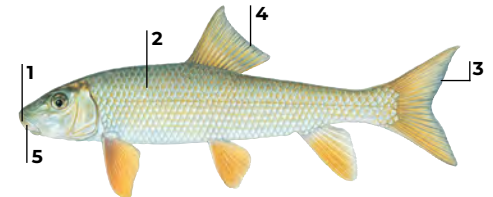


Lake Chubsucker

(Erimyzon sucetta)

Characteristics:	1. thin lips with grooves on small, slightly upturned mouth; 2. deep body; 3. rounded edge on dorsal fin; 4. no barbels
Size:	200 mm; 280 mm
Similar species:	other suckers; Tench
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	shallow, clear, vegetated ponds and lakes over silt, sand, or debris; rarely in streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Endangered under SARA and the ESA

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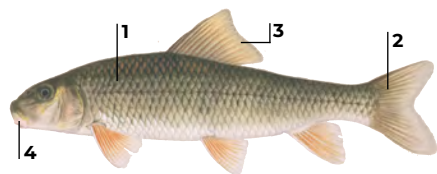


Black Redhorse

(Moxostoma duquesnei)

Characteristics:	1. mouth under snout has thick lips with grooves; 2. large scales; 3. gray caudal fin; 4. concave dorsal fin; 5. lower lip not notched
Size:	285 mm; 537 mm
Similar species:	Golden Redhorse, Greater Redhorse, River Redhorse, Shorthead Redhorse, Silver Redhorse, White Sucker
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	pools in the swifter flowing, medium to large rivers
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Threatened under SARA and the ESA

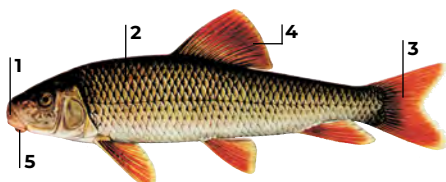
ILLEGAL



Golden Redhorse (*Moxostoma erythrurum*)

Characteristics:	1. large scales; 2. gray caudal fin; 3. concave dorsal fin; 4. lower lip notched
Size:	330 mm; 495 mm
Similar species:	Black Redhorse, Greater Redhorse, River Redhorse, Shorthead Redhorse, Silver Redhorse, White Sucker
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	clear, small- to large-sized streams in riffles over variety of substrates
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

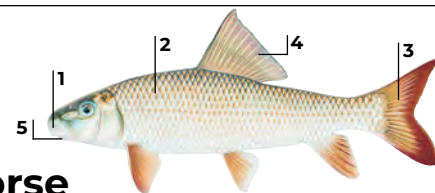
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Greater Redhorse (*Moxostoma valenciennesi*)

Characteristics:	1. thick lips with grooves; 2. large scales; 3. red caudal fin; 4. convex dorsal fin; 5. grooves on lower lip are parallel
Size:	410 mm; 688 mm
Similar species:	Black Redhorse, Golden Redhorse, River Redhorse, Shorthead Redhorse, Silver Redhorse, White Sucker
Ontario distribution:	southern Ontario
Habitat:	large streams in riffles with bottoms of clean sand, gravel, or boulders
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL



River Redhorse (*Moxostoma carinatum*)

Characteristics:	1. mouth under snout has thick lips with grooves; 2. large scales; 3. red caudal fin; 4. dorsal fin edge usually straight; 5. grooves on lower lip are parallel
Size:	580 mm; 813 mm
Similar species:	Black Redhorse, Golden Redhorse, Greater Redhorse, River Redhorse, Silver Redhorse, White Sucker
Ontario distribution:	isolated populations in southern Ontario
Habitat:	rocky pools and swift runs of small- to large-sized streams; impoundments
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Special Concern under SARA and the ESA

ILLEGAL



Shorthead Redhorse (*Moxostoma macrolepidotum*)

Characteristics:	1. thick lips with grooves; 2. large scales; 3. red caudal fin; 4. concave dorsal fin; 5. lower lip notched
Size:	410 mm; 615 mm
Similar species:	Black Redhorse, Golden Redhorse, Greater Redhorse, River Redhorse, Silver Redhorse, White Sucker
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	lakes and streams over bottoms of sand or gravel without heavy silt
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

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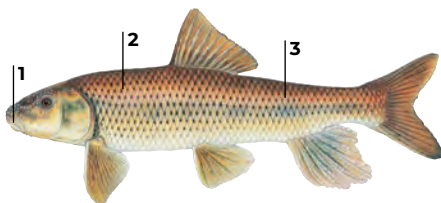


Silver Redhorse

(Moxostoma anisurum)

Characteristics:	1. thick lips with grooves or pimples on mouth under snout; 2. large scales; 3. gray caudal fin; 4. convex dorsal fin; 5. lower lip notched
Size:	400 mm; 686 mm
Similar species:	Black Redhorse, Golden Redhorse, Greater Redhorse, River Redhorse, Shorthead Redhorse, White Sucker
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	mud- to rock-bottomed pools and runs of small- to large-sized streams; occasionally lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL



Spotted Sucker

(Minytrema melanops)

Characteristics:	1. thin lips with grooves; 2. small scales; 3. rows of dark spots at scale bases on back and side
Size:	310 mm; 510 mm
Similar species:	other suckers
Ontario distribution:	southern Ontario
Habitat:	creeks and small rivers with sandy, gravelly, or hard clay bottoms without silt, but occasionally in large rivers and impoundments
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Special Concern under SARA and the ESA

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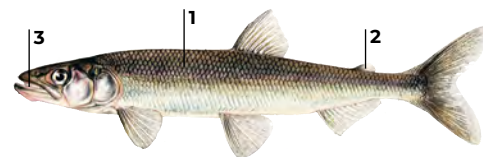


Central Mudminnow

(Umbra limi)

Characteristics:	1. dorsal and anal fins far back on body; 2. black bar on caudal fin base; 3. rounded caudal fin
Size:	75 mm; 161 mm
Similar species:	Blackstripe Topminnow, Banded Killifish
Ontario distribution:	southern Ontario
Habitat:	still, mud-bottomed, often heavily vegetated streams and ponds
Use as bait:	sold and used as bait; hardy (capable of breathing air)

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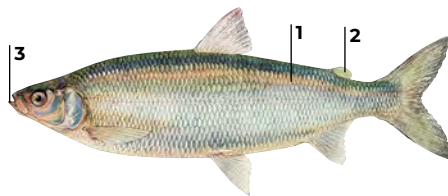


Rainbow Smelt

(Osmerus mordax)

Characteristics:	1. streamlined, elongate body; 2. adipose fin; 3. large teeth on jaw and tongue
Size:	190 mm; 298 mm
Similar species:	cisco species (illegal baitfish, most at risk; most not included in this Primer)
Ontario distribution:	native to Ottawa Valley in Ontario, widely introduced elsewhere
Habitat:	open waters of lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; introduced

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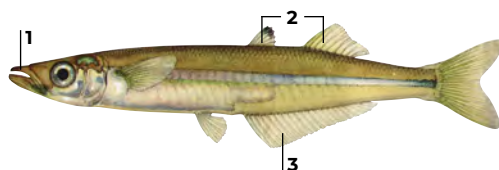


Cisco

(*Coregonus artedii*)

Characteristics:	1. streamlined, elongate body; 2. adipose fin; 3. no teeth
Size:	250 mm; 597 mm
Similar species:	Rainbow Smelt; other cisco species (illegal baitfishes, most at risk; not included in this Primer)
Ontario distribution:	Great Lakes, central and northern Ontario
Habitat:	primarily found in opens waters of lakes but may occur in large streams
Use as bait:	popular in some areas for use as bait for Lake Trout and salmon; CAUTION: similar in appearance to illegal Rainbow Smelt and other at-risk cisco species

CAUTION

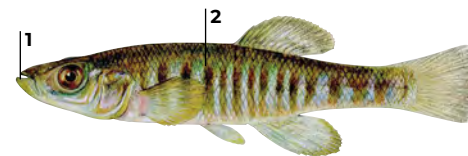


Brook Silverside

(*Labidesthes sicculus*)

Characteristics:	1. small, upturned mouth; 2. two dorsal fins; 3. long anal fin
Size:	75 mm; 108 mm
Similar species:	Emerald Shiner, Silver Shiner; Rainbow Smelt
Ontario distribution:	southern Ontario
Habitat:	warm surface waters of clear streams and nearshore of lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

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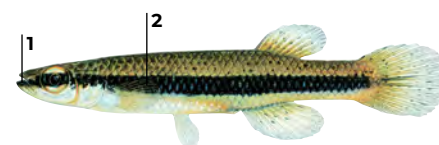


Banded Killifish

(*Fundulus diaphanus*)

Characteristics:	1. small, upturned mouth; 2. 12-20 vertical bars
Size:	70 mm; 98 mm
Similar species:	Blackstripe Topminnow; Central Mudminnow
Ontario distribution:	southern and northwestern Ontario
Habitat:	warm surface waters of clear streams and nearshore of lakes
Use as bait:	recently added as a legal baitfish species

LEGAL

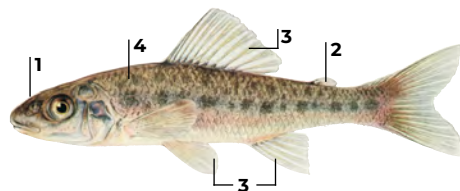


Blackstripe Topminnow

(*Fundulus notatus*)

Characteristics:	1. small, upturned mouth; 2. dark lateral stripe along side
Size:	55 mm; 67 mm
Similar species:	Banded Killifish; Central Mudminnow
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	warm surface waters of small streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; listed as Special Concern under SARA and the ESA

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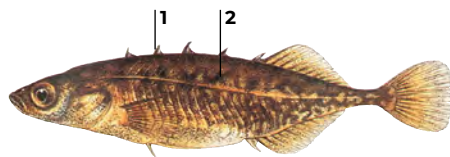


Trout-perch

(*Percopsis omiscomaycus*)

Characteristics:	1. large, unscaled head; 2. adipose fin; 3. spines in dorsal, anal, and pelvic fins; 4. rows of 7-12 dusky spots along back, upper side, and side
Size:	90 mm; 150 mm
Similar species:	none
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	lakes or deep, flowing pools of small- to large-sized streams, usually over sand
Use as bait:	incidental capture and sold with mixed species

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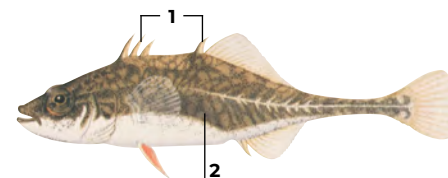


Brook Stickleback

(*Culaea inconstans*)

Characteristics:	1. 4-7 (usually five) short dorsal spines; 2. deep, thin body with no bony plates on side
Size:	50 mm; 76 mm
Similar species:	Fourspine Stickleback, Ninespine Stickleback, Threespine Stickleback
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	quiet, vegetated waters of small rivers, ponds, or lakes over sand, muck, or mud
Use as bait:	only incidental; CAUTION: similar in appearance to illegal Fourspine Stickleback

CAUTION

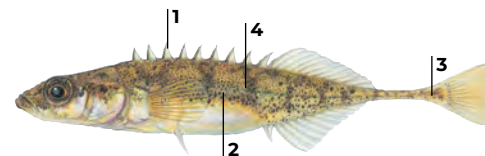


Fourspine Stickleback

(*Apeltes quadracus*)

Characteristics:	1. four dorsal spines of various lengths, wide gap before last spine; 2. no bony plates on side
Size:	45 mm; 53 mm
Similar species:	Brook Stickleback, Ninespine Stickleback, Threespine Stickleback
Ontario distribution:	introduced into northwestern Lake Superior
Habitat:	quiet, vegetated waters
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; introduced

ILLEGAL



Ninespine Stickleback

(*Pungitius pungitius*)

Characteristics:	1. nine short dorsal spines; 2. slender body; 3. well-developed keel on caudal peduncle; 4. no bony plates on side
Size:	65 mm; 89 mm
Similar species:	Brook Stickleback, Fourspine Stickleback, Threespine Stickleback
Ontario distribution:	widespread in northern Ontario
Habitat:	shallow, vegetated areas of streams, ponds, or lakes; deep waters of Great Lakes
Use as bait:	only incidental

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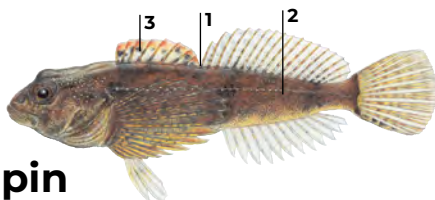


Threespine Stickleback

(Gasterosteus aculeatus)

Characteristics:	1. three dorsal spines, last very short; 2. bony plates on side; 3. bony keel along side of caudal peduncle
Size:	50 mm; 75 mm
Similar species:	Brook Stickleback, Fourspine Stickleback, Ninespine Stickleback
Ontario distribution:	isolated populations mainly in central and eastern Ontario
Habitat:	shallow areas over mud or sand with vegetation
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; introduced in some parts of Ontario

ILLEGAL

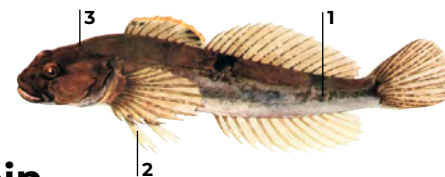


Mottled Sculpin

(Cottus bairdii)

Characteristics:	1. dorsal fins joined at base; 2. 2-3 dark bars on body under second dorsal fin; 3. large black spots at front and rear of first dorsal fin
Size:	75 mm; 133 mm
Similar species:	Slimy Sculpin; Round Goby, Freshwater Tubenose Goby (Spoonhead and Deepwater sculpins look similar but, due to their deepwater habitats, they are not included in this Primer)
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	riffles of small streams and headwaters over rubble or gravel; rocky shores of lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

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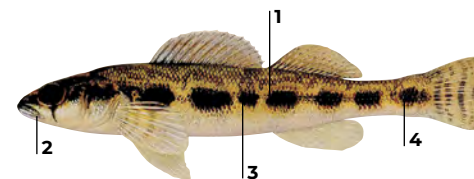


Slimy Sculpin

(Cottus cognatus)

Characteristics:	1. long, fairly slender body; 2. three pelvic rays; 3. prickles on head and behind pectoral fin base
Size:	75 mm; 115 mm
Similar species:	Mottled Sculpin; Round Goby, Freshwater Tubenose Goby (Spoonhead and Deepwater sculpins look similar but, due to their deepwater habitats, they are not included in this Primer)
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	rocky areas of cold streams and lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL



Blackside Darter

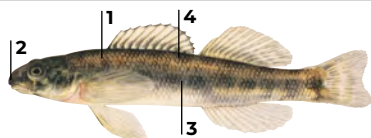
(Percina maculata)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. large mouth; 3. 6-9 large, oval, black blotches along side; 4. black caudal spot
Size:	60 mm; 99 mm
Similar species:	Logperch
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	riffles and pools of medium-sized streams over gravel and sand with an abundance of vegetation
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL

Channel Darter

(Percina copelandi)



Characteristics: 1. slender, elongate body; 2. blunt snout;
3. 9-10 horizontally-oblong, black blotches along side;
4. black X's and W's on back and upper side

Size: 43 mm; 61 mm

Similar species: River Darter

Ontario distribution: isolated populations in southwestern and southeastern Ontario

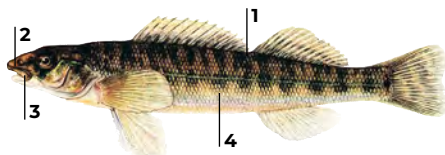
Habitat: pools and margins of riffles of small- to medium-sized streams usually over sand and gravel; shores of lakes

Use as bait: illegal under the OFRs; Lake Ontario and Lake Erie populations are listed as Endangered under SARA and St. Lawrence populations are listed as Special Concern under SARA; listed as Special Concern under the ESA

ILLEGAL

Logperch

(Percina caprodes)



Characteristics: 1. slender, elongate body; 2. large mouth;
3. dusky teardrop; 4. many alternating long and short bars along side

Size: 90 mm; 180 mm

Similar species: Blackside Darter

Ontario distribution: widespread

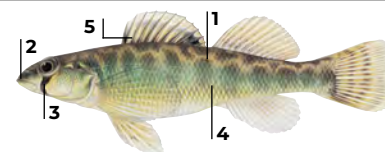
Habitat: medium to large streams, rivers, and lakes over sand and gravel bottoms

Use as bait: illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL

River Darter

(Percina shumardi)



Characteristics: 1. slender, elongate body; 2. large mouth; 3. black tear-drop; 4. 8-15 black bars along side; 5. small, black spot at front and large, black spot near rear of first dorsal fin

Size: 56 mm; 76 mm

Similar species: Channel Darter

Ontario distribution: widespread in northwestern Ontario, isolated populations in southwestern Ontario

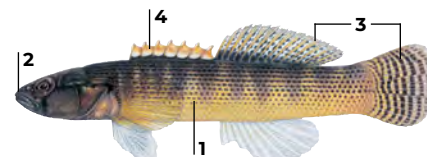
Habitat: medium- to large-sized streams with strong, deep current over sand, gravel, or rock

Use as bait: illegal under the OFRs; COSEWIC has assessed these populations as Endangered but status is pending under SARA; Great Lakes-upper St. Lawrence populations are listed as Endangered under the ESA

ILLEGAL

Fantail Darter

(Etheostoma flabellare)



Characteristics: 1. slender, elongate body; 2. small mouth;
3. black bands on second dorsal fin and caudal fin;
4. gold knobs on tips of dorsal spines

Size: 50 mm; 82 mm

Similar species: Greenside Darter, Iowa Darter, Johnny Darter, Least Darter, Rainbow Darter, Tessellated Darter

Ontario distribution: southwestern Ontario

Habitat: gravel- and boulder-bottomed streams of slow to moderate flow

Use as bait: illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL



Greenside Darter (*Etheostoma blennioides*)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. small mouth; 3. dusky teardrop; 4. 5-18 green W's, V's, or bars on side
Size:	75 mm; 100 mm
Similar species:	Fantail Darter, Iowa Darter, Johnny Darter, Least Darter, Rainbow Darter, Tessellated Darter
Ontario distribution:	isolated populations in southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	small- to large-sized streams among rubble and small boulders with attached filamentous algae
Use as bait:	illegal under OFRs; introduced beyond native range

ILLEGAL



Iowa Darter (*Etheostoma exile*)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. small mouth; 3. black teardrop; 4. middle red band on first dorsal fin
Size:	50 mm; 72 mm
Similar species:	Fantail Darter, Greenside Darter, Johnny Darter, Least Darter, Rainbow Darter, Tessellated Darter
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	clear, standing, or slowly moving waters of streams, small to medium rivers, and lakes with aquatic vegetation, and a bottom of organic debris and sand
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

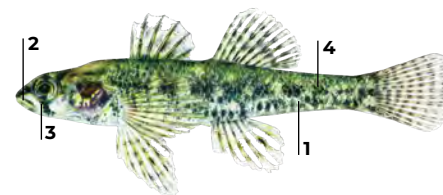
ILLEGAL



Johnny Darter (*Etheostoma nigrum*)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. small mouth; 3. black teardrop; 4. dark brown X's and W's along side
Size:	50 mm; 72 mm
Similar species:	Fantail Darter, Greenside Darter, Iowa Darter, Least Darter, Rainbow Darter, Tessellated Darter
Ontario distribution:	widespread
Habitat:	wide variety of aquatic habitats but most common in quieter waters over bottom of sand, gravel, silt, or a combination of these, but do inhabit weedy areas or gravel riffles of streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL



Least Darter (*Etheostoma microperca*)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. small mouth; 3. large, black teardrop; 4. dark green saddles
Size:	25 mm; 42 mm
Similar species:	Fantail Darter, Greenside Darter, Iowa Darter, Johnny Darter, Rainbow Darter, Tessellated Darter
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario, isolated populations in northern Ontario
Habitat:	clear, quiet, weedy waters of lakes and slow-moving, small- to medium-sized streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

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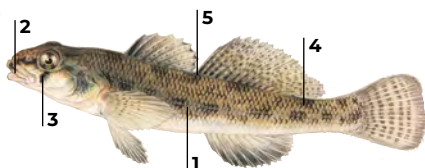


Rainbow Darter

(Etheostoma caeruleum)

Characteristics:	1. relatively deep-bodied; 2. small mouth; 3. no teardrop; 4. 6-10 dark saddles
Size:	50 mm; 81 mm
Similar species:	Fantail Darter, Greenside Darter, Iowa Darter, Johnny Darter, Least Darter, Tessellated Darter
Ontario distribution:	southwestern Ontario
Habitat:	fast-flowing, gravel- and rubble-bottomed riffles of small to medium streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL

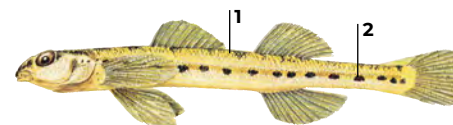


Tessellated Darter

(Etheostoma olmstedii)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate body; 2. small mouth; 3. black teardrop; 4. dark brown X's and W's along side; 5. six dark brown saddles
Size:	62 mm; 80 mm
Similar species:	Fantail Darter, Greenside Darter, Iowa Darter, Johnny Darter, Least Darter, Rainbow Darter
Ontario distribution:	southeastern Ontario
Habitat:	lakes and rivers over mud, sand, or rock bottom
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs

ILLEGAL

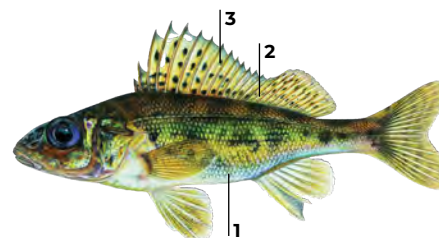


Eastern Sand Darter

(Ammocrypta pellucida)

Characteristics:	1. slender, elongate, transparent body; 2. 10-19 horizontal, dark green blotches along side
Size:	66 mm; 84 mm
Similar species:	other darters
Ontario distribution:	isolated populations in southwestern and southeastern Ontario
Habitat:	sand-bottomed areas of small to large streams and wave-protected beaches of large lakes
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; Ontario population listed as Threatened under SARA; Southwestern Ontario population listed as Threatened and West Lake population listed as Endangered under the ESA

ILLEGAL

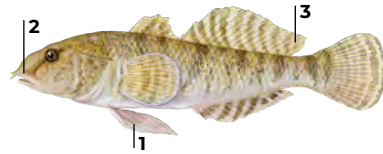


Ruffe

(Gymnocephalus cernua)

Characteristics:	1. fairly deep, compressed body; 2. broadly joined, spiny dorsal fins; 3. many small, black spots on dorsal and caudal fins
Size:	110 mm; 180 mm
Similar species:	Yellow Perch (not included in this Primer)
Ontario distribution:	introduced into western Lake Superior
Habitat:	lakes; quiet pools and margins of streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; invasive species

ILLEGAL

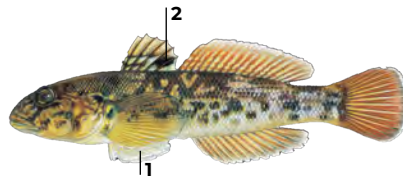


Freshwater Tubenose Goby

(Proterorhinus semilunaris)

Characteristics:	1. fused pelvic fins; 2. long anterior nostrils; 3. spiny dorsal fin with oblique black lines (no spot)
Size:	50 mm; 85 mm
Similar species:	Round Goby; Mottled Sculpin, Slimy Sculpin (Spoonhead and Deepwater sculpins - not included in this Primer)
Ontario distribution:	isolated, introduced populations in southwestern Ontario and Lake Superior basin
Habitat:	shallow, vegetated areas of lakes and streams
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; invasive species

ILLEGAL



Round Goby

(Neogobius melanostomus)

Characteristics:	1. fused pelvic fins; 2. greenish, spiny dorsal fin with a black spot
Size:	75 mm; 244 mm
Similar species:	Freshwater Tubenose Goby; Mottled Sculpin, Slimy Sculpin (Spoonhead and Deepwater sculpins - not included in this Primer)
Ontario distribution:	introduced populations in the Great Lakes and tributaries
Habitat:	rocky or gravelly habitat; generally inhabit the nearshore area of lakes but will migrate to deeper water in winter; also found in tributaries
Use as bait:	illegal under the OFRs; invasive species

ILLEGAL



Rusty Crayfish

(Faxonius rusticus)

Characteristics:	1. greenish-coloured claws with dark black bands near the tips; 2. prominent rusty patches on either side of the carapace
Size:	to 130 mm
Similar species:	native crayfishes (not included in this Primer)
Ontario distribution:	isolated; introduced in southern Ontario
Habitat:	streams and lakes with adequate rock, log, and debris cover and substrates of clay, silt, and gravel
Use as bait:	CAUTION: overland transport is prohibited; anglers can capture their own crayfish but must use it in the waterbody where it is captured

CAUTION

What You Can Do to Minimize Impacts to Aquatic Ecosystems



Aerial view of northern Ontario in the fall, with dark blue water grey skies, and green trees along the shoreline.

- Follow the latest version of Ontario's Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary as it pertains to the harvest, sale, and use of baitfishes.
- Do not deposit or release live or dead bait or baitfish (including fish eggs, gametes, or fish parts) or the water, soil, or other materials used to hold any of these items into, or within 30 m of, any waters.
- Be cautious in timing of baitfish harvesting. Ninety-five per cent of legal baitfishes in this Primer are known to spawn in Ontario during the spring months (April-June).
- Do not over-harvest one area.
- Use traps instead of nets (note: only licensed harvesters can use seine nets), especially in vegetated areas. Resident anglers must only use minnow traps or dipnets.
- Remember, not all small fishes are minnows. "Minnows" refers to fishes in the Minnow family (Leuciscidae). All fish species, including sport fishes, are small at some time during their lives.
- Never release species into a waterbody from which they were not harvested.
- If you suspect a species at risk has been harvested, return it immediately to the place of capture.
- Avoid transfer of introduced species by destroying all unused bait and disposing of the contents of your bait bucket at least 30 m from a waterbody.
- Report sightings or captures of introduced species to the Invading Species Hotline at 1-800-563- 7711 or visit www.invadingspecies.com. The Hotline is operated by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Any invasive species caught should be immediately euthanized and not released back into any waters.
- To report a natural resources violation, please call 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667) toll-free anytime. You can also call Crime Stoppers anonymously at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

◆ Further Reading



Vibrant blue water with Flowerpot Island in the background in Tobermory, Ontario, Canada. Dark green trees line the rocks under a light blue sky with wispy, white clouds.

- Boschung, H. T., J.D. Williams, D.W. Gotshall, D.K. Caldwell and M.C. Caldwell. 1989. The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Fishes, Whales, and Dolphins. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY.
- Coad, B.W. 1995. Encyclopedia of Canadian Fishes. Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa, ON and Canadian Sportfishing Productions Inc., Burlington, ON.
- Holm, E., N. E. Mandrak and M. E. Burridge. 2022. A Field Guide to Freshwater Fishes of Ontario. Royal Ontario Museum. 488 pp.
- Lavett-Smith, C. 1994. Fish Watching: An Outdoor Guide to Freshwater Fishes. Comstock Publishing Associates, Ithaca, NY.
- Moyle, P.B. 1993. Fish: An Enthusiast's Guide. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Page, L.M. and B.M. Burr. 2011. A Field Guide to Freshwater Fishes: North America North of Mexico. Peterson Field Guides. Houghton Mifflin Co., New York, NY.
- Scott, W.B. and E.J. Crossman. 1973. Freshwater Fishes of Canada. Bulletin of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada 184. (1999 Reprint, Galt House Publications, Oakville, ON).
- DFO Publications: Aquatic Invasive Species, Projects Near Water, Measures to Protect Fish and Fish Habitat, and other DFO publications (www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca).
- Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and Invading Species Awareness Program. 2024. Guide to Ontario's Crayfishes. 71 pp.



Fisheries and Oceans Canada Pêches et Océans Canada

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

867 Lakeshore Road
Burlington, ON, L7S 1A1
(855) 852-8320
dfo-mpo.gc.ca



Bait Association of Ontario



***Ontario Ministry of
Natural Resources***

300 Water Street
Peterborough, ON, K9J 8M5
1-800-387-7011; NRISC@ontario.ca
ontario.ca/MNR



***Ontario Federation of Anglers
and Hunters***

4601 Guthrie Drive, PO Box 2800
Peterborough, ON, K9J 8L5
(705) 748-6324
www.ofah.org