

Common carp

Cyprinus carpio

Description

First introduced to North America in the 1870s as a food and sport fish. Common carp are now widely distributed throughout southern Canada and most of the United States.

Identification

Brassy yellow to golden brown or dark olive sides and white below. Body is deep and thick and strongly arches to the dorsal fin. Clear to dusky fins with some red on caudal and anal fins. Each scale has dark edges and a dark spot at the base. Two barbels on each side of upper jaw; rear one is much larger. Long dorsal fin and a stout sawtoothed spine at the front of the dorsal and anal fins. Subterminal mouths and pharyngeal teeth in adults. on average 16 to 18 inches but can grow up to 48 inches.

Habitat

Native to Asia and parts of Europe. Prefer warm, shallow, quiet and well-vegetated waters. Found



in pools of small to large rivers as well as lakes and ponds.

Reproduction

They spawn from late spring to early summer in very shallow water at the edges of streams and lakes. Adults will energetically splash along the shore at this time. Spawning behavior often occurs in groups of one female and four to five males. Females release more than 50,000 eggs over submerged objects, and eggs take about 12 days to hatch. No parental care is provided to the eggs or fry.

Impact

Known to root in mud, increasing turbidity and resulting in uprooted native aquatic plants, disturbed bottom habitats and decreased populations of native fishes. The increased turbidity also makes it more difficult for predatory fishes to find prey, and it also inhibits aquatic plant growth by limiting the sunlight they receive. Common carp's reproduction rates and tolerance to polluted water allow populations to spread quickly to new bodies of water.

Similar

Goldfish (*Carassius auratus*), which can be distinguished by having a pair of barbels at each corner of their mouth, small eyes, thick lips, a forked tail and a single dorsal fin; and Grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*) which can be distinguished by the presence of two rather long, fleshy barbels on each side of the upper jaw.

Monitoring and Rapid Response

Common carp removal and control began in the 1950s. State programs to trap, seine, or poison the

fish were frequent but often unsuccessful. State-regulated commercial fishing to control carp problems has been a favored control method since the 1980s. Control of this species continues to be a problem for many states.

Credits

The information contained in this factsheet was provided by the Shedd Aquarium. Photos (T-B) courtesy of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wikipedia, and the Shedd Aquarium.