

# Ontario's Warmwater Gamefish



## Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*)

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Channel catfish are elongated, with a broad flat head; the snout is much more pointed than the brown bullhead's. They are the largest of the catfish in Canada, ranging 14–21" (35-53 cm) on average, although they can get much larger. They have four sets of barbels (whiskers), three under their head and one pair on top. Their back and sides range in color from steel blue to grey, while their belly is generally white. They may have a number of small black spots along the sides of its body. They have a deeply forked tail, which distinguishes them from the bullheads. Channel catfish have very sharp bony fin rays on their pectoral (front) fins. These fins are what cause the "sting", not the whiskers as many anglers think.



**Common Names:** channel catfish, channel cat, spotted catfish

### Habitat of the Channel Catfish

Channel catfish are found throughout southern and central Ontario, primarily in the lower Great Lakes and some of the larger rivers. Channel catfish prefer cooler deeper water with sand, gravel or rubble bottoms. They are often found in areas of rivers with high current.

### Spawning Patterns of the Channel Catfish

Spawning occurs in late spring or early summer. Fish may move into rivers to spawn where they are available. They spawn in secluded areas such as undercut banks, under logs or in spaces within rock piles. Eggs hatch in 5 – 10 days.

### The Diet of the Channel Catfish

Channel catfish feed both at night and during the day. Their diet includes aquatic insects, crayfish, algae, as well as fish.

### Age and Growth Ranges of the Channel Catfish

In Ontario, channel catfish are relatively slow growing and can be very long lived. Fish have been reported up to 40 years of age! In the St. Lawrence/Ottawa River area, a 12" (30 cm) channel cat is around 7 years old, while a 22" (56 cm) fish weighing about 5 lbs may be 20 years old or more.

### Tips on Fishing for Channel Catfish

Channel catfish are becoming increasingly popular among Ontario anglers, because of their large size and strong fighting ability. Channel catfish are caught by fishing on the bottom, often in areas with some current. Baits include balls of nightcrawlers, large minnows (dead), or various prepared baits.

