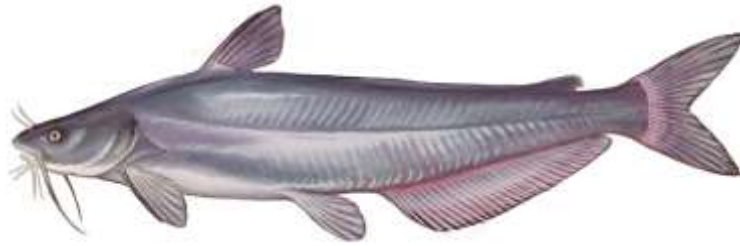


**ANGLER ALERT:  
Blue Catfish**



*Image by D. Raver*

**Occurrence in Delaware**

Blue catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*), a native of the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio River drainages, were introduced into Virginia during the 1970s and 1980s to provide recreational fishing. They have since spread to surrounding waters, including Delaware, where they potentially threaten native fish and wildlife resources. In Delaware, Blue Catfish have invaded the Delaware and Nanticoke River systems and some of their tributaries. They were first confirmed in the Delaware waters of the Nanticoke River in 2012 and now have an established, reproducing population.

**Identification**

Blue catfish are heavy bodied with a wide head and a 'dorsal hump'. They have four pairs of black whisker-like barbels around their mouth and are scaleless like most catfish species. They are bluish-gray fading to white on the ventral side. They do not have spots but are often confused with large Channel Catfish *Ictalurus punctatus*. The easiest way to differentiate the two species in the field is to look at the margin or edge of the anal fin. Blue cats have a very straight edged anal fin whereas Channel Cats have a rounded edge. In addition, Blue Catfish have 30-35 rays in the anal fin versus Channel Catfish which have 25-29 rays.

**Habitat**

Blue Catfish are primarily a freshwater fish species that prefers large rivers with swift currents and sandy bottoms, but can tolerate higher salinities and a variety of habitat types. Nesting habitat typically includes dark, protected areas such as under rocks or hollow submersed logs.

**Life History**

Blue Catfish spawn in the late spring to early summer. Unlike most catfish species, both the male and female guard the eggs and young until they disperse into surrounding cover. This species is highly fecund with females producing thousands of eggs per kilogram of body weight. They are relatively long lived and can survive to age 20 or more. Research has shown this species to grow rapidly and have a high survival rate, which leads to increased abundance.

Blue catfish are opportunistic bottom-feeders that use their long barbels to search for food. They forage on a variety of food items including plant matter, insects, crustaceans, worms and other fish like menhaden, shad and river herring. They are considered voracious predators and because they grow rapidly and can attain a large body size, have the potential to displace native species and impact the aquatic food web. Adult Blue Catfish have few natural predators.

## Legal Status

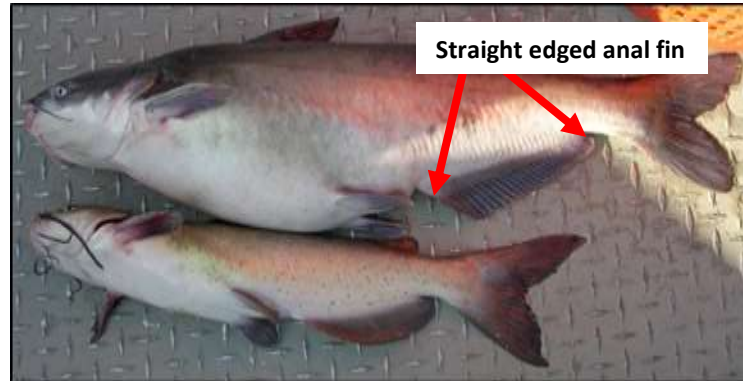
Range expansion in addition to illegal stocking has contributed to the spread of this species in Delaware. A regulation passed in 2013 prohibits the transport, purchase, sale, stocking and possession of live Blue Catfish in Delaware. There are no season, creel, or size limits for this species.

## What to do if you catch a Blue Catfish

Anyone who catches a Blue Catfish in Delaware waters is encouraged to kill it and notify the Division of Fish and Wildlife at (302) 735-8654 or 739-9914 or [Edna.Stetzar@state.de.us](mailto:Edna.Stetzar@state.de.us) with information on the date and specific location of the catch and the size of the fish. Submission of a photo allows the Division to confirm the catch. Unfortunately, once established this hardy fish has proven difficult to eradicate, making preventative measures even more crucial. The Division of Fish and Wildlife is closely documenting the occurrence of this species in an effort to gain a better understanding of the potential impact on Delaware's freshwater ecosystems. The information provided by anglers is an important part of this process.

## Additional Blue Catfish links:

- Printer friendly handout - <http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/fw/Fisheries/Documents/Invasive%20Species/Blue%20Catfish-Fact%20Sheet%202018.pdf>
- Blue Catfish-Delaware Fish Facts <http://fishspecies.dnrec.delaware.gov/FishSpecies.aspx?habitat=1&species=22>
- USGS Species Profile <https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.aspx?SpeciesID=740>



*The blue catfish (top) can be differentiated from channel catfish (lower) by spreading out the anal fin and looking for a **straight** rather than lobed appearance.*