

Wildlife Express!

Volume 26/Issue 4

Yellow Perch

December 2012

Yellow Perch



Photo courtesy Chris Sullivan

What's a Fish?

Fish are vertebrates. They have backbones, just like you. Fish also breathe through gills, have fins and live in water. That seems pretty simple, right? Well, in nature things aren't always as simple as we would like.

Take the backbone for example. We know what our backbone is like, but in the fish world, not all backbones are created equal. Sharks and sturgeon have a backbone made of the same stuff that supports your nose and ears! It is called cartilage. Cartilage is not hard at all!

Fish need oxygen to survive. Most fish have a special way to get oxygen out of the water they live in – gills. Water, with oxygen in it, passes over the gills when the fish swims. The skin on the gills is thin. Oxygen can pass through the skin into the fish's bloodstream.

Does this mean that all fish use gills to get the oxygen they need? No, some fish actually have

lungs! In fact, the African lungfish needs to breathe air above the water's surface. It will "drown" if held under water for too long. The Australian lungfish can survive out of water for months if it is in a wet burrow. Lungfishes are examples of fish that break the "gill rule."

We usually think of fish as having fins on each side of their bodies, but what about lampreys? Lampreys look like eels. They don't have paired fins or jaws, but they are still fish. Lampreys are an ancient fish species. They travel to and from the ocean just like salmon.

As you can see, a simple job like defining what a fish is, is not so simple. There are over 20,000 different species of fish worldwide. All live in their own special habitats. Over time, they have adapted to live in many underwater (and even out-of-water) habitats.

Pucker Up!



There are about 20,000 different species of fish that live on Earth. That's a lot of fish! Every fish is specially adapted to live in its habitat. A fish's mouth can tell you a lot about its habitat, and what it likes to eat.

A sturgeon's mouth is found under its head. The upper lip is longer than the lower lip, and it is rounded down. Sturgeon look down for their food, and this shape helps them suck up their lunch.

Other fish have a lower jaw that is longer than the upper jaw.

This is how a barracuda's mouth is designed. Barracuda live in the ocean. They have long, thin mouths with lots of sharp, pointy teeth. Barracuda like to eat other fish that they see swimming above their heads. A small upper jaw lets them see their food clearly.

Have you ever caught a carp or sucker? They look like they are puckered up and ready for a kiss all the time! Their lips are large with rounded edges. Puckered lips are perfect for grabbing small plants and animals, which is just what these fish like to eat.

Some fish look like they have duckbills. Pike are large, predatory fish that love to eat other fish.

Have you grabbed a hold of a fish before? It can be difficult to get a good grip with the slime that covers fish.

A pike's mouth might look like a duck's bill, but it has something ducks don't have on their bills – teeth! Pike open their big mouths and slam their teeth down on the fish. It's difficult for a fish to get out of that grip!

Bass are gulp feeders. You need a large mouth to gulp food, and bass have a mouth that is huge. A bass will swim up behind a fish, crayfish or other creature, open its mouth, and surround its prey. Bass gulp up not only the prey, but also a big mouth of water. The water is pushed out of the mouth and flows over the gills.

Think about yellow perch and the food they eat. Can you guess their mouth shape? Look at the pictures in Wildlife Express to see if you are right. Fish sure have some interesting mouths. Next time you catch a fish, look at its mouth and think about how that shape helps it get its food.

Holiday Gifts

During the holiday season, our thoughts are about the things that are closest to us – our family and friends. We think about what gifts we can give them to show we care. If you were to add wildlife to your gift-giving list, what might you give?

Habitat is the most pressing need for wild animals. A good habitat will provide food, water, shelter and space. These four things must be arranged so the animal doesn't have to travel too far to find them. What things could you do to improve habitat in your area?

Conserving natural resources is important. Conserve means to protect or preserve, or to use carefully or sparingly. If you recycle paper, fewer trees will need to be cut down to make new paper. Recycling plastic decreases the amount of oil needed to make new plastic. You also reduce the amount of trash you throw away when you recycle. If you turn your thermostat down, you're conserving energy. You can also pick up garbage or plant a tree. You will be helping wildlife and

will be helping to keep the planet healthy. What other "gifts" could you give wildlife?

Some people like to feed birds. Here are some fun ideas for bird feeding and decorating for the holidays. Make a garland of air-popped popcorn, fresh cranberries and orange slices. Hang the garland outside on a tree. Then coat pinecones with peanut butter and roll the pinecones in bird seed. Hang these "ornaments" in the tree. You may want to add some seed baskets. Cut grapefruits in half and scoop out the pulp. Poke holes in each side of the hollowed out grapefruits and string yarn through the holes to make a handle. Fill the baskets with black oil sunflower seeds or cracked corn and hang them on the tree. You now have a festive holiday tree and a treat for your feathered friends.

Enjoy watching the birds eating their holiday feast. Remember, by taking care of habitats, you are taking care of wildlife and giving them a wonderful gift.

Brrr... My Fins are Cold!

What happens to fish in the winter? Most fish are cold-blooded. Their body temperatures are the same as the temperature of the water in which they live. So what happens to fish when ice starts to form on top of the water and winter shows its bitter side?

For fish that live in rivers, things don't change too much. The temperature of the water does drop, but the moving water usually keeps ice from completely covering the surface of the river. Things are a bit different for ponds and lakes where perch live. Ice acts like a lid on top of the water. Light and oxygen can't get through the ice. Not only fish are affected, but everything living under the ice is affected as well.

One thing that ice can do is lower the amount of oxygen in the water. Fish and other animals that live in the water need oxygen to survive. One way oxygen gets into the water is by waves and splashes. Water can't move if it is covered by a blanket of ice, so less oxygen gets into the water to replace the oxygen used by animals. To lessen the amount of oxygen they use, fish and other animals slow down. They become less active, so they use less oxygen.

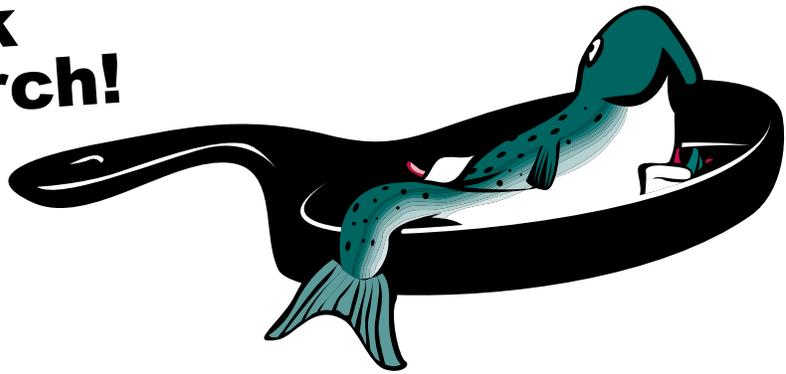
Just like many trees drop their leaves in the fall, so do many water plants. Plants need sunlight to make food. Ice acts like a curtain on top of a pond. It keeps much of the light from entering the water. This causes many plants to stop

making food. Their leaves drop off. Sometimes even the stems die. With their leaves gone, plants shut down and rest for the winter. Plants are no longer making oxygen. This can further decrease the amount of oxygen in the water. If there is not enough oxygen in the water, fish may begin to die. When this happens, it is called a "winterkill."

Next time you see a pond or lake in the winter, think about the creatures living in it. What are the animals doing to survive the winter?



Let's Cook Up Some Perch!



One reason people love to catch yellow perch is because they taste so good! Yellow perch have a white, mild tasting flesh. They usually don't taste "fishy." Here are some yellow perch recipes to try!

Fried Yellow Perch

- 1/2 cup flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 egg
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 cup butter
- 2 tablespoons paprika
 - yellow perch fillets

Mix flour, paprika, and salt together and set aside. In a small bowl, blend the egg and the milk. Heat butter in a large frying pan. Dip perch fillets in egg wash first and then into the flour mixture. Carefully place them into the hot butter in the frying pan and brown on both sides. Remove fish and drain on a paper towel to absorb excess butter.



Baked Butter Herb Perch Fillets

- 1 pound yellow perch fillets (about 12)
- 1/2 cup butter or margarine
- 2/3 cup crushed saltine crackers
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon basil leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder

Preheat oven to 350°F. Melt butter or margarine in a 13 x 9 inch baking pan in preheated oven. In a bowl, combine cracker crumbs, Parmesan cheese, basil, oregano, salt and garlic powder. Dip yellow perch fillets into butter, then coat in crumb mixture. Arrange the yellow perch fillets in baking pan. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until fish flakes easily with a fork.

Yellow Perch Nuggets

- 1 pound yellow perch fillets (about 12)
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup dry pancake mix
- 1 egg
- 1 can 7-Up soda
- canola oil for frying

Combine pancake mix, egg and 7-up in bowl and beat until well mixed. Refrigerate the batter for at least 30 minutes. Put flour in plastic bag. Add yellow perch fillets and shake to coat. Heat oil in large frying pan, 1/4 inch deep to 375 degrees. Take floured fillets and dip one at a time into the batter. Carefully place in hot oil and fry until golden brown on each side.



Let's Go Ice Fishing!

Fishing in December? You bet! Winter is a great time to get out and enjoy the fresh, crisp air. It is also a great time to fish for yellow perch. They look for food all winter long, so they can offer hours of enjoyment while ice fishing.

Ice fishing is fun, but so is being safe! Here are some important things to remember when ice fishing. Never venture onto the ice alone. Ice fishing is best done in pairs or groups; make sure you have an adult along. Ice is usually safe for walking when three to four inches thick. You will need eight to 10 inches of clear, solid ice if you venture out with an ATV or snow machine.

It is important to stay dry and

warm when fishing this time of year. You should dress in layers; wear waterproof snow pants and a coat; warm winter boots; and don't forget gloves and a hat. It's also a good idea to bring along an extra set of clothes and a pair of shoes just in case you get wet. Most important of all - don't forget the thermos of hot chocolate! Hot chocolate always has a way of making even the coldest day feel warm!

There are some special pieces of equipment you will need to ice fish - an ice auger and ladle. The ice auger is for drilling holes in the ice, and the ladle is used to scoop out ice that forms in your holes.

There are special ice fishing poles, but you really don't need one. Any simple rod and reel will work fine. You can even use a stick with fishing line wrapped around the stick! Perch tend to be in fairly deep

water (up to 40 feet) in the winter, so you will need to add some weight to the fishing line. Now all you need is a hook and bait. Natural bait, like a worm or maggot, will work well. You can even try a lure if you like.

To get started, drill a series of test holes. For safety's sake, no hole may be larger than 10 inches in diameter. Try different locations at different depths until you find fish. You can drop in your line and wait for a strike, or jig. To jig, drop the bait to the bottom, and then reel up about two feet of line. Slowly raise the rod tip about a foot, and then drop it back down. Repeat this until a fish strikes.

Now that you know a bit about ice fishing, grab an adult and go fishing! When you find a school of perch, ice fishing can be fast and furious. It's a blast!



Yellow Perch

It is easy to see how yellow perch got their name. They have a greenish-yellow color down the back and sides, with darker colored bands running from their backs to their bellies. The fins are not yellow; they are usually orange.

Yellow perch are small fish, averaging around seven to nine inches, but their size varies from lake to lake. “Big” perch are 12 inches long. Some lakes are known for growing “jumbo” perch that are consistently large. Cascade Reservoir and Hayden Lake are two places known for having good yellow perch fishing. The largest yellow perch caught in Idaho weighed 2 pounds, 9.6 ounces and was 16 inches long! It was caught in Cascade Reservoir.

Something that makes yellow perch different from trout is the fins. Trout have one fin on the back; yellow perch have two fins. Yellow perch also have spines on their fins! The fin closest to the yellow perch’s head is the pokey one. It has 13 to 15 sharp spines. The back fin closer to the tail is softer, but it also has one or two spines, as does the lower fin close to the tail. Even the flap that covers the gills has a spine. This is a fish that you should handle with care!

Yellow perch spawn, or lay their eggs, in April or May when the water temperature reaches 45 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Unlike trout, yellow perch do not lay their eggs in gravel nests. To give the eggs some protection, yellow perch lay their eggs in shallow water close to water plants. Reeds, cattails or fallen trees will help protect the eggs from predators. Females release their eggs during the night or early morning. The eggs are deposited in long ribbons of jelly-like material containing numerous eggs. These ribbons stick to plants, logs or rocks in the water. In about 10 to 20 days the eggs will hatch. After hatching, the young yellow perch travel together in schools. They grow slowly in Idaho, unless they live in a warm reservoir with lots of food.

Young yellow perch eat zooplankton they find in shallow water among water plants. Zooplankton are microscopic animals floating in the water. As they grow, yellow perch switch to eating aquatic insects and small fish.

Yellow perch have been introduced to Idaho. That means that they are a fish that people brought into our state. Keep an eye out for yellow perch in lakes and reservoirs. They are rarely found in flowing water.



Photo courtesy Jim Fredericks

Watching Wildlife in Winter

Winter is a great time to observe wildlife. Animals, like elk and deer, often move into valleys and onto south-facing mountain slopes. They do this to get away from deep snow and cold. This makes them easier to observe. Birds flock to backyard feeders, letting you observe them from the comfort of home. Tracks in fresh snow help you learn more about your wild neighbors. What you find might surprise you!

Water is important for wildlife in winter. Ducks like goldeneye, hooded merganser and ring-necked duck spend the winter on Idaho's rivers and lakes. The bald eagle is an impressive visitor you may see. Our nation's symbol is found in Idaho year-round. In addition, other migrating eagles come to Idaho to spend the winter. With more eagles, you have a better chance of seeing them. Bald eagles gather along rivers and large lakes where they hunt for fish and ducks. Sometimes you can see several hundred eagles gathered along the shoreline of a large lake. What a spectacular sight!

If you live near a river or lake, look for wintering eagles. These three-foot tall birds are easy to spot. Attend an eagle watch program in the Idaho Panhandle to observe wintering bald eagles. You can contact the Idaho Department of Fish and Game's Panhandle Regional Office at 208-769-1414 for more information. It's a great wintertime family activity.

Whenever you observe wildlife, remember to be a responsible watcher. Wildlife in winter need to conserve as much energy as possible to survive until spring. Do not approach wildlife too closely. Observe from a safe distance and use binoculars if you have them.

Stay in your car or stand behind it to hide yourself. Enjoy watching winter wildlife!



BE OUTSIDE
SUPPORTS OUTDOOR EDUCATION

It's a Contest!



Wildlife Express wants to see your creative side. We are looking for some great poems to publish in our May issue. If we publish your poem, you can claim to be a published author! You will also receive a fabulous prize. We know there are some very talented writers and artists out there, so put on your thinking caps and get writing! Here are the rules:

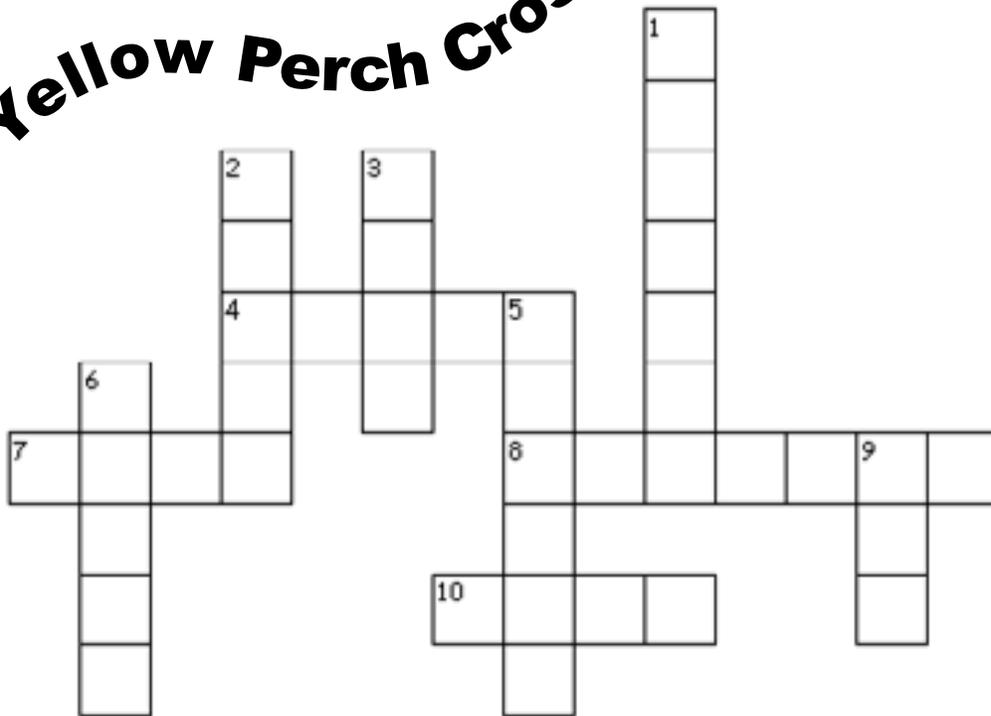
- The poem must be about wildlife that lives in Idaho. Poems about pets or other wild animals, such as monkeys or pandas, will not be considered for great prizes.
- All poems must have some artwork. You can include a drawing of the animal or make a border around the poem. Bright colors look great in print!
- Be sure to check your poem for spelling mistakes and use your best writing or type your poem.
- Write your name, teacher's name, school and school address on the back of your entry.
- We must receive your entry by March 6, 2013. Late entries will not be opened.

Send your entries to:

Wildlife Express Poetry Contest
P.O. Box 25
Boise, ID 83707

Need ideas? Ask your teacher about different poem styles. He or she may find some ideas in Educator's Express. Have fun and good luck!

Yellow Perch Crossword



- WORDS**
- Auger
 - Cold
 - Deep
 - Four
 - Gills
 - Insects
 - Mouth
 - Ribbons
 - Spines
 - Ten

Across

4. This is what fish use to get oxygen out of the water.
7. Ice is safe to walk on when three or _____ inches thick.
8. Yellow perch eat zooplankton, _____ and small fish.
10. Yellow perch like to be in _____ water in the winter.

Down

1. Yellow perch eggs are deposited in _____.
2. This is used to drill holes in ice when ice fishing.
3. Most fish are _____ blooded.
5. Yellow perch have _____ on their fins.
6. Looking at a fish's _____ will give you an idea of how it eats.
9. An ice fishing hole cannot be large than _____ inches in diameter.

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express, it may be included in a future issue! Send it to the address printed above! Look for printable copies of Wildlife Express on the web at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>