



FLATHEAD CATFISH

The Flathead Catfish, *Pylodictis olivaris* (also sometimes called 'mud cat' or 'yellow cat'), is native to rivers and lakes in the lower Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds to the Gulf states. It was introduced into the James River in Virginia to provide recreational angling in the late 1960s and has since spread within the region.

The first catch of a Flathead Catfish reported to state biologists was in 2010 from the Brandywine River. Occurrence in Delaware has primarily been reported by anglers fishing in the Brandywine and Christina Rivers. This species is currently more abundant in surrounding states including the upper Delaware River and tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. In areas where Flathead Catfish were introduced they have severely reduced the abundance and diversity of native fish species. Although they feed primarily on invertebrates such as worms, insects, and crustaceans when they are young, the adult diet is primarily piscivorous (i.e. consists of live fish). There is a direct effect from predation but also an indirect effect of competition with other species that depend on native fish species for prey or to fulfill other ecological functions. They grow large (with few predators) quickly and their populations have the potential to expand rather rapidly once established (one nest can contain up to 100,000 eggs).

As with other catfish species, Flathead Catfish have smooth, scaleless skin. The skin is typically pale yellow to light brown on the back and sides with heavily mottling that is black, brown or olive brown. The underside or belly is white or pale yellow. The head is broad and flattened with a lower jaw that projects beyond the upper jaw. The tail fin is only slightly notched and appears square or slightly rounded. It has whisker-like barbels around its mouth.

Anglers that catch Flathead Catfish are encouraged to positively identify the species first, and then kill rather than return it to the water. Contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife, Fisheries Section at (302)739-9914 or Edna.Stetzar@delaware.gov to report Flathead Catfish occurrences. There is also an online application that can be used to submit reports of invasive fish: <https://arcg.is/1iyb9T>



QUICK FACTS

- Can grow to 3-4' long and 100lbs. under ideal conditions
- Prefer larger rivers with sluggish pools and underwater debris
- Feed only on live prey they ambush
- Lifespan averages 12-14 years, up to 28 years
- Few predators after reaching full size
- Males aggressively defend nests, eggs and fry
- Grow rapidly with high survival rate

