



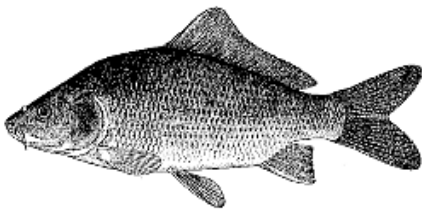
Freshwater Fish of Victoria: Carp

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Common Name:

Carp

Other Names:

European carp, common carp, German carp, Asian carp, Chinese carp, edible carp, great carp

Family:

Cyprinidae

Scientific Name:

Cyprinus carpio (Linnaeus, 1758)

Status:

Introduced, Noxious

Description

Stocky fish, with a moderate sized head and a triangular, scaleless, blunt snout. Moderate sized mouth, with no teeth on the jaws, the upper jaw protrudes slightly. Usually four barbels or whiskers present; two long, one at each corner of the mouth, two short, one at each end of the upper lip. Large, thick scales. Strong, saw-edged spine at the front of the dorsal fin. Olive-green to golden upper body, but there are many colour variations including black. Paler sides and usually a silvery-yellow belly. Fins are opaque, dark, usually with reddish edges.

Distribution

Widespread and common in south-eastern Victoria and waters of the Murray-Darling system. Occurs in other systems and waters in western and south-western Victoria. Extremely common in many localities, but absent east of the Snowy River.

Habitat

All types of water bodies, being able to survive a wide range of water temperatures (5-32°C), very low oxygen levels, and clear to very dirty water.

Usually most abundant in still or slow flowing water. Can survive in water quality situations too poor to support most other fish species, and can survive for several hours out of water in damp conditions.

Brief Biology

This species can grow to more than 1 m in length and exceed 60 kg in weight. In Victoria it has been recorded at 11 kg.

The carp is omnivorous and can adapt its feeding behaviour and diet to feed by a sucking action, straining bottom mud for insects and detritus, or taking insects and other food items, including small plants, from the water surface. Males mature at 2-4 years, females 3-5 years. Females produce large numbers of small eggs. There is no migration associated with spawning, which normally occurs in spring and early summer. Spawning takes place in shallow water with much surface action; this activity and splashing spreads the adhesive eggs. Young fish hatch about 5 days later. Large females may breed more than once in a season. Spawning success and growth of fish varies considerably, depending on water conditions.

Other Notes

The carp is native to Asia but it has been spread by man to all continents except Antarctica. A very active swimmer, it is able to negotiate flood flows in rivers and jump barriers up to 1 metre in height.

The majority of carp in Victorian waters are referred to as the "Boolaro group", arising from introduction of fish to Victoria in 1960 and their subsequent distribution by man. Carp have subsequently been found to travel long distances, up to 1,000 km.

Carp have been blamed as a major contributor to the decline of native fish populations in northern stream systems through their explosive spread and abundance in the late 1960's-early 1970's, but it is fair to say that this rapid expansion of carp reflected its ability to colonise suitable waters. Native fish had already suffered declines

in range and abundance before the introduction of carp, largely through the impact of man on the aquatic habitat.

A major Victorian research program during the 1970's assessed means of control, and made detailed studies of carp behaviour and impact on waterways and other fishes. In summary, no means of practical control was identified, and carp were assessed generally as being a nuisance which would have to be accepted. More detailed information on this research program is available in Information Note FN0014: Carp in Victoria.

Other Varieties

Other varieties of carp occur in Victorian waters, including:

- "Leather Carp" which has few if any scales;
 "Mirror Carp" which has a few, very large, mirror-like scales scattered about the body.

Hybrids Carp and goldfish are known to interbreed to produce hybrid fish which generally fit the carp description. Some of these hybrids have two pairs of barbels at the mouth, but some hybrids have also been identified which have no barbels.

Regulations

Carp is declared a Noxious Fish in Victoria, which makes it an offence to possess, transport or release live carp, or

use live carp (including all forms of carp and goldfish) as fishing bait.

The declaration of "noxious" fish does not mean that the species cannot be fished for, or eaten. Carp are widely fished for, and the flesh is enjoyed by many people, with a variety of methods of preparation and cooking.

Recreational Fishing Licence requirements and regulations affecting the taking of carp are provided in the Victorian Recreational Fishing Guide, available free from RFL sales agents and DPI Offices.

Further Reading

Freshwater Fish of Victoria is a series of brief information material on the native and introduced freshwater fish of Victoria's inland waters. Further, detailed reading on carp is contained in:

- *A Guide to the Freshwater Fish of Victoria*
Phillip Cadwallader & Gary Backhouse,
Department of Conservation and Environment
- *Australian Freshwater Fishes*
John R. Merrick & Gunther E. Schmida
- *Salmon at the Antipodes*
John Clements

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