

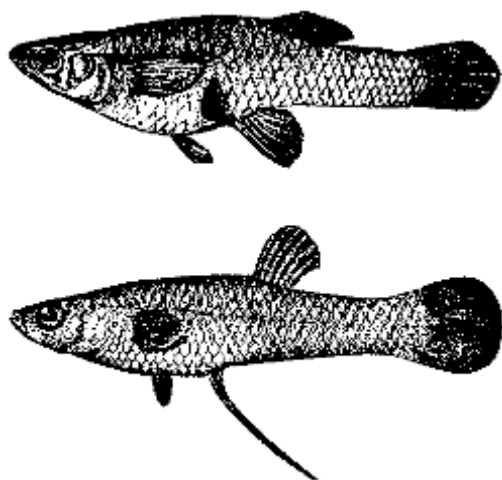


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## Freshwater Fish of Victoria: Mosquitofish



Top - Female; Bottom - Male

**Common Name:** Mosquitofish

**Other Name:** Nil

**Family:** Poeciliidae

**Scientific Name:** *Gambusia holbrooki*, Girard, 1859

**Status:** Introduced, Noxious

### Description

Upper body colour is dark brown to bluish-brown or greenish, sides are grey and the belly is white. Uprturned mouth. No lateral line. Single dorsal fin. Eyes are large. Female is deeper in the body with a much deeper stomach and a large black blotch at the rear of the belly. The male is clearly distinguished by the very long rays of the anal fin.

### Distribution

Widespread in Victoria and abundant in some localities.

### Habitat

Most frequently found in slow-flowing warmer waters. The species congregates among aquatic vegetation near the banks.

### Brief Biology

Females grow to a maximum length of 6 cm, males rarely exceed 3.5 cm. Hardy and able to withstand a wide range of water temperatures (3 to 41°C), oxygen levels and salinities. Male internally fertilises the female using the abnormally long rays of the anal fin.

Fertilised eggs develop inside the female which gives birth to up to 80 young several times a year during the warmer months. Individual fish may reach sexual maturity when only two months old. The species is primarily a carnivore, eating a wide variety of small aquatic invertebrates and surface insects. Feeding habits are flexible and algae and detritus are also eaten.

### Other Notes

Native to rivers draining into the Gulf of Mexico. First introduced to Australia in 1925, with further introductions before and during World War 2. Initially introduced to control malarial and other mosquitos; dietary studies indicate that the value of the species in this area is no better than other insectivorous fishes. Although its impact on mosquitos has been negligible, it has assumed pest proportions in some waters and appears to have had a significant effect on some native fish populations. It is a pugnacious fish, attacking other fish by nipping their fins.

### Regulations

It is declared a "Noxious Fish" in Victoria, which makes it an offence to release live specimens into Victorian waters. The use of live Mosquito fish as bait in Victorian waters is prohibited.

## 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 Mosquitofish is contained in:

- *Freshwater Fishes of South-Eastern Australia*  
R M McDowall (Ed.)
- *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

## Acknowledgements

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It was reviewed by Taylor Hunt, Fisheries Victoria in March 2009.

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