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Natural History Notes

MIKE DOMBECK grew up in the Moose Lake area and graduated from Hayward High School and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He has a B.S. degree in Biology and an M.S. degree in Aquatic Biology. He has taught Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and is currently a fisheries biologist with the U.S. Forest Service, living in Munising, Michigan. Mike has also been an area fishing guide since his high school days.

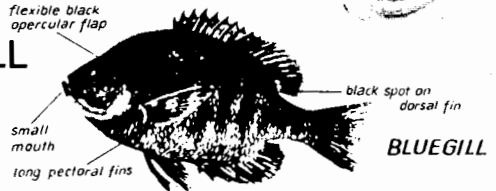


OUR BEST LIKED FISH — THE BLUEGILL

The bluegill is probably the most commonly known and widely distributed fish in Wisconsin's waters. Many young fishermen had their first thrill fishing this scrappy little fish using a cane pole and worms for bait. It just might have been this experience that made them fans and participants of America's most popular sport, fishing. No expensive tackle nor costly equipment is necessary for this sport. A cane pole, hook and line, bobber and a can of worms is all that is needed to pursue the bluegill. And this fisherman need not worry about equipment failures or his outboard motor not starting. All he needs is a sunny bank on his favorite bluegill lake. These are all the ingredients necessary for a completely pleasant day. The bluegill is also the mainstay of the ice-fishing fraternity. There are almost as many winter bluegill enthusiasts as fair weather bluegill fishermen.

There are probably more bluegills caught in the Midwest than all other fish combined. Their reproductive capabilities are very great. In fact, many lakes have such a high bluegill population that the competition for food is so great that they become stunted and never grow to a size large enough for man's consumption. Often larger predators such as northerns are stocked to control the immense bluegill population. However, this method usually isn't effective since anglers easily catch the predator and leave the smaller fish behind.

As is the case with most members of the sunfish family the male bluegill prepares the nest by fanning out depressions in the sand in 2-4 feet of water prior to spawning. The male later guards the nest and the newly hatched young. The brightly colored bluegill caught off a spawn bed is the male. He instinctively protects the nest and will pick up the bait or any other foreign object and carry it away from the nest, often with no intention of eating it. As many as 70,000 eggs have been found in a single large female. She is courted by a male and enticed to lay her eggs in his nest while he fertilizes them. After spawning, she is chased away and if she still has some eggs left she will be courted by another male



BLUEGILL

and spawn again. The female's only role is egg-laying, while the male remains to protect and eggs and fry. Bluegill spawn in colonies and if you walk quietly along the shore of a bluegill lake you will see the circular spawning beds which are called redds. When you spot the redds, stand very still and soon you will see the bluegills diligently watching over their nests. The bluegill can be fished at this time without danger of depleting the population. First, the bluegill has tremendous reproductive capabilities and, secondly, most bluegill caught during spawning season are males.

Ask any knowledgeable angler what their favorite food fish is and the answer will almost always be the same. Most would rather eat this fish over wall-eye or trout. Their flesh is white, flaky, firm and indescribably delicious. There is no better eating than a pan full of freshly caught bluegills fried until golden brown. Add some crispy fried potatoes, steaming baked beans, and all you need is an appetite!

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