

# IDENTIFYING TEXAS CATFISH

L-2096

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"A catfish is a catfish is a catfish," someone said. But there is more than one kind of catfish and it may be important sometime to know exactly the type that one has in hand. This guide illustrates and points out particular features of Texas catfishes. It will help the reader correctly identify the species.

One characteristic that may be used to categorize catfishes is the tail shape. The blue, channel, sea (hardhead) and gafftop catfishes have a distinct deeply-forked tail. The flathead, black bullhead, yellow bullhead and madtom catfishes have a rounded or not deeply-forked tail.

## CATFISHES WITH A DEEPLY-FORKED TAIL AND SNOUT WHISKERS

- \*\*Blue
- \*\*Channel

**CHARACTERISTICS WHICH DISTINGUISH THE CHANNEL FROM THE BLUE CATFISH:** The channel catfish's anal fin (arrow) has 24-29 rays including rudiments with its free margins more or less rounded. Rays are soft rod-like structures which support the fin membranes and extend from the body proper to the fin tips. The blue catfish's anal fin has 30 to 35 rays including rudiments, its free margin nearly straight.

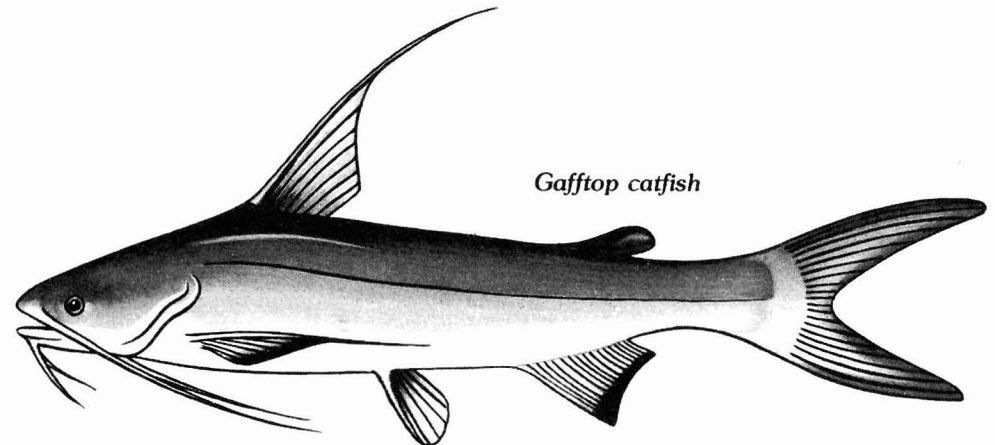
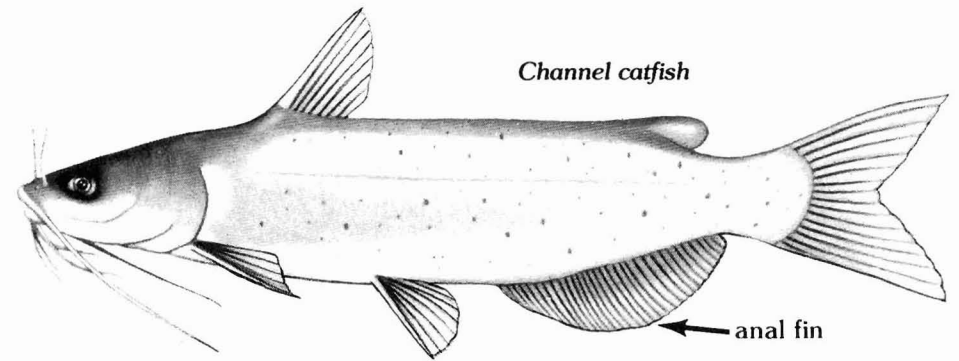
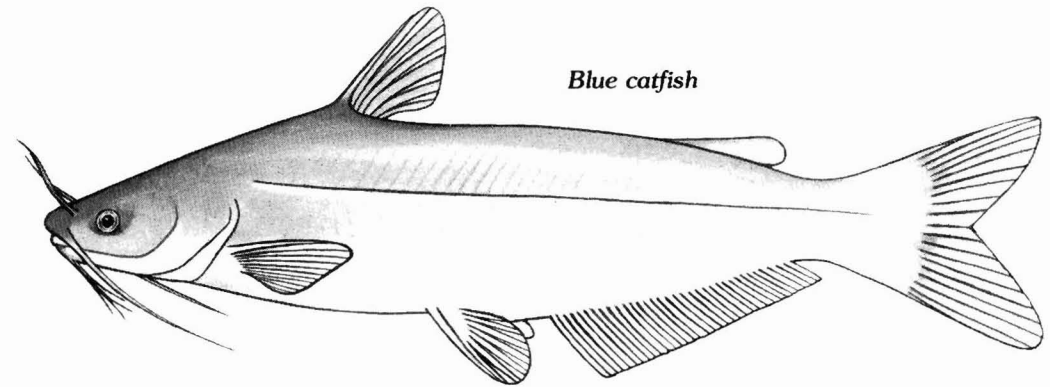
**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:** The blue catfish (in some areas called high-fin blue) has a generally straight profile from the topfin to the topline. Spots are present on the sides of young channel catfish but are lost as fish age. Adult channel catfish, particularly males, have an enlargement of the head during spawning season, which gives them an unusual appearance. Sizes in pounds: Blue—150 maximum, 25-50 considered large, up to 15 common. Channel—25-30 maximum, 10 considered large.

## CATFISHES WITH A DEEPLY-FORKED TAIL AND WITHOUT SNOUWHISKERS

- \*\*Gafftop
- \*\*Sea (Hardhead)

**CHARACTERISTICS WHICH DISTINGUISH THE GAFFTOP FROM SEA CATFISH:** The gafftop has one pair of whiskers on the chin. Its upper lip whiskers, topfin tip and front sidefin tip are greatly prolonged. The gafftop lives in marine and brackish water areas. The sea catfish (not figured) also lives in the marine environment and can be distinguished from the gafftop by lack of exceptionally prolonged upper lip whiskers and fin tips and by the presence of two pairs of chin whiskers. Sizes in pounds: Sea—up to 1 common. Gafftop—up to 2 common, 4-5 maximum.

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## CATFISHES WITH ROUNDED OR NOT DEEPLY-FORKED TAILS

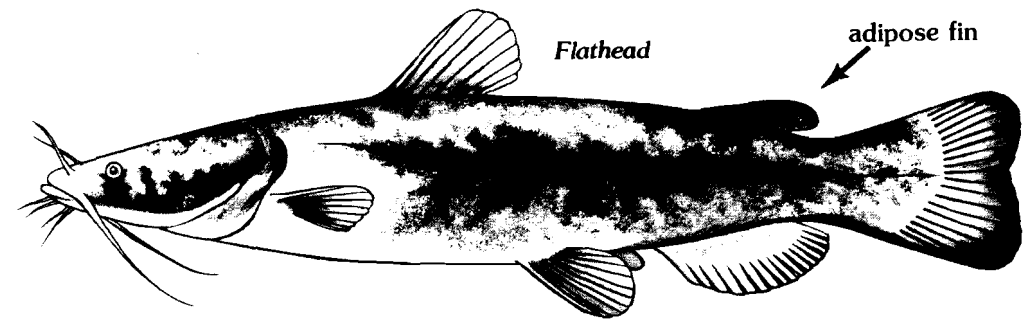
\*\*Flathead \*\*Black Bullhead \*\*Yellow Bullhead \*\*Tadpole Madtom \*\*Freckled Madtom

**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FLATHEAD:** The flathead has a protruding bottom lip and less than 16 rays in the anal fin. As the name implies, its head is very flat. The tail of younger fish has a conspicuous whitish upper edge. The variety of names which have been applied to the flathead catfish often cause confusion when people from different places hear a story about a catch. Among other names, this same fish is called yellow cat and opelousas (opp) cat. The flathead catfish reaches 100 pounds and it is commonly caught in the 5 to 50 pound range.

**CHARACTERISTICS THAT DISTINGUISH THE BLACK FROM THE YELLOW BULLHEAD:** The black bullhead's chin whiskers are dark at all ages, and the tailfin is slightly notched. Anal fin rays number 17-24. The yellow bullhead's chin whiskers are white except for slight coloration in older individuals. The tailfin is evenly rounded, anal fin rays number 24-27. Size in pounds: yellow and black bullheads—4 maximum, up to 2 common.

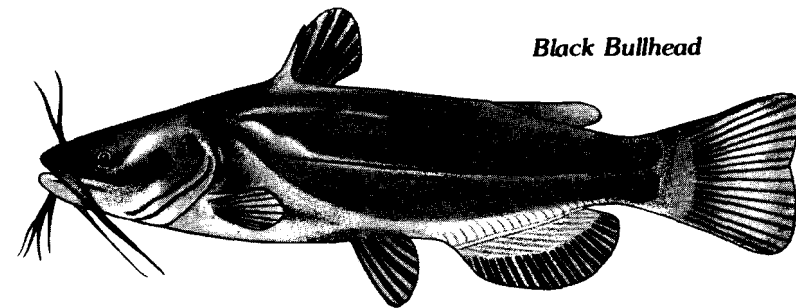
**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF MADTOMS:** The tadpole madtom's adipose fin is continuous with the tail fin (see pictures for comparison). Color is a plain brown. The freckled madtom (not figured) also has a continuous adipose-tailfin, but has dusky fins with narrow pale margins. Body coloration is plain brown or freckled on brown. One important characteristic of madtoms is their small size. Texas madtoms are usually less than 2 inches as a maximum size.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:** The preceding description portrays catfishes which one can expect to encounter in Texas waters. Two rare, tiny catfishes have been found in subterranean water in Bexar County and the eastern brown bullhead has been recorded in the northeastern corner of Texas at Caddo Lake. The headwater catfish, a close relative of the channel catfish, is distributed in the upper Pecos River in New Mexico but may range into Texas in that river system. There is not much known about this catfish.

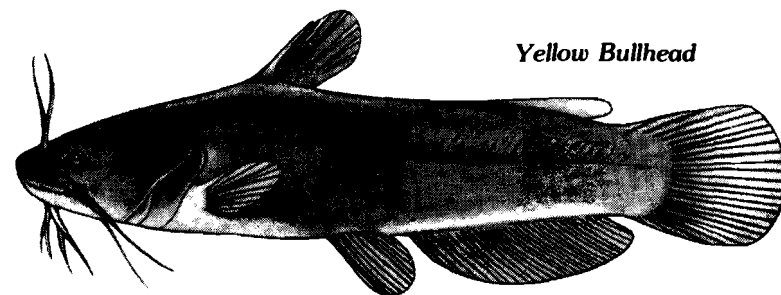


Flathead

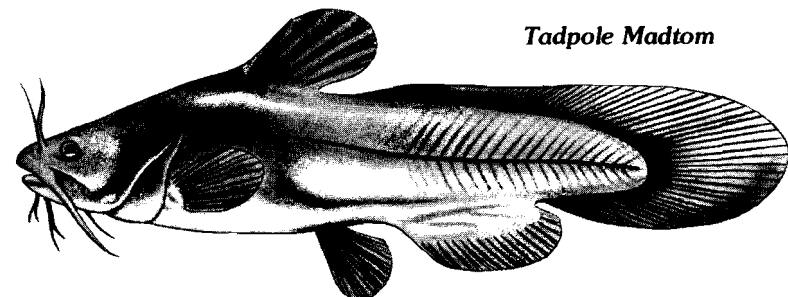
adipose fin



Black Bullhead



Yellow Bullhead



Tadpole Madtom

Artist: T.L. Green, Extension Art Group Supervisor

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