

Spotted Gar

Lepisosteus oculatus



TPWD PHOTO

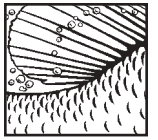


The spotted gar is one of three gar species native to Texas. Gar are long and cylindrical with elongated mouths. They are primitive fish and date back to the Cretaceous period, some 65 to 100 million years ago. The ancestors of spotted gar swam with the dinosaurs!

Northern Pineywoods

Spotted Gar

Lepisosteus oculatus



APPEARANCE

Length: 3 feet (0.9 m)

Weight: 8 pounds (3.6 kg)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Upper body brown to olive
- Silver-white sides
- Head, body, and fins have olive-brown to black spots that help camouflage the fish.
- Broad, dark stripe on the sides of immature fish
- Long, snout-like mouth lined with strong, sharp teeth
- Thick, *ganoid* (diamond-shaped) scales

LIFE HISTORY

Range: From central Texas east into western Florida; extends north through Mississippi River drainage into Illinois, lower Ohio River, and the Lake Erie drainage

Diet: Fry feed primarily on insect larvae and tiny crustaceans, but fish appear on the diet of young gar very early. Prey is usually swallowed headfirst.

Predators: Larger fish, alligators, herons, cottonmouth snakes

Sexual maturity: Males mature in two to three years. Females mature when three to four years old.

Spawning season: From April to May

Eggs: The number varies greatly, but up to about 20,000 green, adhesive eggs are attached to aquatic plants.

Incubation: Ten to 14 days

Young: Young gar have specialized pads on their upper jaws that allow them to adhere to vegetation. They remain attached to plants until they are about 0.75 inches (2cm) long. The pad is lost when last of the yolk sac is absorbed.

Life span: Up to 18 years

HABITAT

Spotted gar prefer quiet, vegetated waters of streams, swamps and lakes. They sometimes enter brackish waters along the Gulf Coast.

BEHAVIOR

Gar move slowly unless trying to catch food, which it grabs in its jaws in a quick sideways lunge. They often bask near the water's surface on warm days. They spawn in shallow water with low flow and heavy vegetation. Several males court a single larger female at the same time.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- Gar have a specialized swim bladder which allows them to gulp air and live in the poorly oxygenated back waters of Texas' streams, swamps and lakes.
- *Lepisosteus* is Greek and means "bony scale," referring to the large ganoid scales. *Oculatus* means "provided with eyes" in Latin and refers to the dark spots on head, body, and fins.
- The common name, *gar*, is rooted in the Anglo-Saxon language and means "spear."
- The *roe* (or egg mass) is highly toxic to humans, animals and birds.

SPOTTED GAR AND PEOPLE

A large gar can eat a lot of fish, including catfish, causing them to compete with some anglers. Because of the competition and because many people think gar are difficult to clean, gar are sometimes called a "trash" fish. This term may not be warranted when you consider that spotted gar, like all native species, have an important role to play in their ecosystem.