

Armored Suckermouth Catfish

Hypostomus plecostomus

Additional Genera in Florida:

Pterygoplichthys plecostomus – Sailfin Catfish

Order: Siluriformes

Family: Loricariidae

Description: Suckermouth catfish are brownish in color and appear to have many darker spots. There are approximately 116 different species, making identification difficult. All of the species in the Loricariidae family have large sucker mouths, however the suckermouth catfish may grow up to 18" in length, making it one of the largest home aquarium fish.

Special Features:

- **Tolerance** - Suckermouth catfishes occur in fresh running waters and brackish waters. They appear to tolerate both cold and oxygen-poor waters.
- **Size** - Males are smaller than females.

Range and Habitat: This species naturally occurs in tropical America, including South and Central America from Uruguay north to Panama. Their range has increased in peninsular Florida to include rivers leading to Tampa Bay and southward to the canals of southeast Miami-Dade County. Adult suckermouth catfishes are typically found in rocky streams, whereas juveniles are more common in areas rich in vegetation. Adults spend most of their time hidden and attached to the underside of logs or large rocks.

Wild Diet: Algae and detritus constitute their main food items.

Reproduction: Suckermouth catfish do not typically breed in captivity. In the wild, ripe males develop barbel-like appendages about their mouth,

whereas females have a tendency to develop swollen abdomens. Eggs are spawned on the surface of substrates, such as stones or logs, or in holes. Males care for the eggs, which hatch in 3-5 days.

Notes:

- **Interest to Fisheries** - Suckermouth catfish are of little or no value as a food fish, although they are at least occasionally consumed in their native range.
- **How Did They Get Here?** - The populations established throughout Florida are believed to have been introduced through escapes from tropical fish farms and releases by recreational aquarists.
- **Feeding** – Some species are more carnivorous than others, but the species established in Florida mainly eat organic material.
- **Potential Impacts** – The plecos' broad salinity and temperature tolerance improves their chances of expanding their range and increasing their abundance in the Gulf.
- **Additional Research** - Plecos may not be a significant factor limiting nesting success of cichlids and native sunfishes. The fact is there has been no research on the subject.