

Walking Catfish

Clarias batrachus

Family: Clariidae

Order: Siluriformes

Description: Walking catfish may appear dark brown, gray, or olive with white specks on the latter half of the flanks. Fins are gray-green and there may be red borders on the median fins and some yellow on the dorsal fin. Although all Florida imports were originally albinos (which are tinted yellow at the outer margins of dorsal fins), albinos in the wild are now rare and descendants have reverted to the dominant, dark-color phase, probably a result of natural selection by predators.

Special Features:

- **Locomotion** – Snakelike
- **Breathing** – The gills of the walking catfish are stiffened to prevent collapse while out of water. On land, they keep their gills closed and in the water the gills remain open. On land, they breathe most efficiently using a special part of the gill chamber consisting of spongy organs that grow from the upper ends of the gill arches. These organs are well supplied with blood vessels and operate efficiently on land as well as in low oxygen waters.
- **Barbels** – Walking catfish possess 4 pairs of barbels: one pair of nasal, one pair of maxillary and two pairs of mandibular barbels.
- **Male or Female?** - The male of this species is usually more colorful than the female. The most distinguishing feature however, is a dark spot on the rear of the male's dorsal fin.

Range and Habitat: The native range of the walking catfish spans Southeast Asia and includes eastern India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma, Indonesia, Singapore and Borneo. They are commonly found in freshwater and brackish water. They can exist in cloudy, low-oxygen waters.

Wild Diet: Omnivore. Walking catfish are mainly active at night and prey on items such as insect larvae, fish eggs, fish and occasionally plant material.

Reproduction: It is reported that walking catfish engage in mass spawning migrations in late spring and early summer. Adhesive eggs are laid in a nest or in submerged vegetation and the males guard the eggs. Juveniles appear in late summer and sexual maturity is attained by the end of the first year.

Notes:

- **Introduction** - In the early 1960s, walking catfish were imported to Florida from Thailand for the aquarium trade.
- **Movement** – In Florida, dispersal apparently has occurred by way of the interconnected network of canals. However, spread was accelerated by overland migration, typically during rainy nights.
- **Impact of Introduction** - Largely unknown. In Florida, walking catfish are known to invade aquaculture farms, entering ponds where these predators prey on fish stocks. In response, fish farmers erect fences to protect ponds, though they are inefficient in floods.
- **Threats** – Cold weather is believed to be the only threat in the introduced range.
- **Status** - In 1967 the importation or possession of the walking catfish was outlawed in the state of Florida.