

Endangered and Threatened Fish Species

Ready Reference Guide

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New York State Fishing Regulations include a list of threatened and endangered fish species that must not be kept if they are caught. New York State mandates: “Any unintentionally caught threatened or endangered fish species must be unhooked and released immediately. They may not be handled for any purpose other than removing the hook and placing them back into the water”¹. While several of the species on the list are small “minnow-sized” fishes, sturgeon varieties or odd-looking and very rarely caught bottom-dwellers, some may be mistaken for game fish found in Central New York. This guide is meant to provide a handy reference for distinguishing Endangered or Threatened species from common game-fish.

The full list of endangered and threatened fish species of New York State includes:

Endangered: silver chub, bluebreast darter, deepwater sculpin, gilt darter, pugnose shiner, round whitefish, shortnose sturgeon, Atlantic sturgeon and spoonhead sculpin.

Threatened: eastern sand darter, lake chubsucker, lake sturgeon, northern (longear) sun-fish, mooneye, gravel chub, banded sunfish, longhead darter, swamp darter, spotted darter and mud sunfish.

Silver Chub

The chub is a silvery minnow that grows up to a maximum length of 9”. It may be mistaken for an immature silver bass (aka Sheepshead).



Silver Chub



Silver Bass

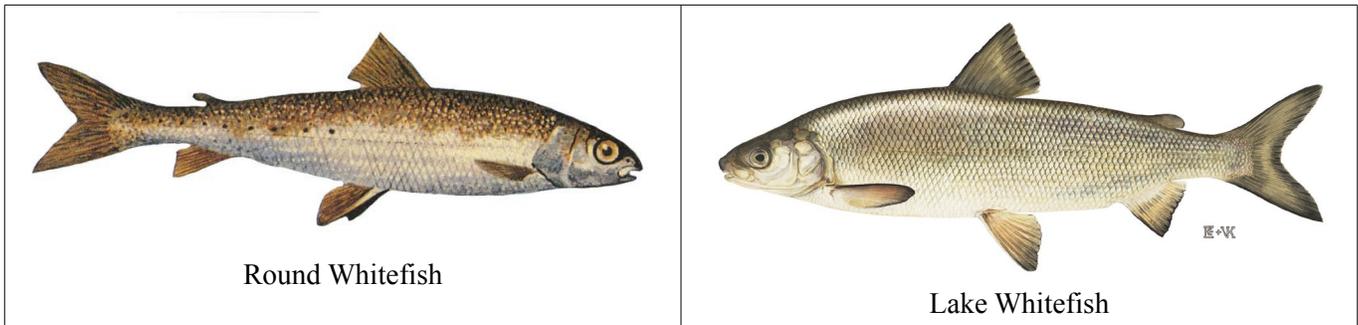
The silver bass has a very prominent, spiny first dorsal fin and a substantial second dorsal fin, whereas the silver chub has a much smaller single dorsal fin. The scales of the silver bass are smaller and more matted in color and the fish has dotted horizontal lines running along the body. The chub has much larger silvery scales.

Silver Chub Fact Sheet: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26010.html>

¹ New York State Fishing Regulations, 2017-2018. http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/fish_marine_pdf/fishguide.pdf. p. 50.

Round Whitefish

The round whitefish may be mistaken for a lake whitefish.

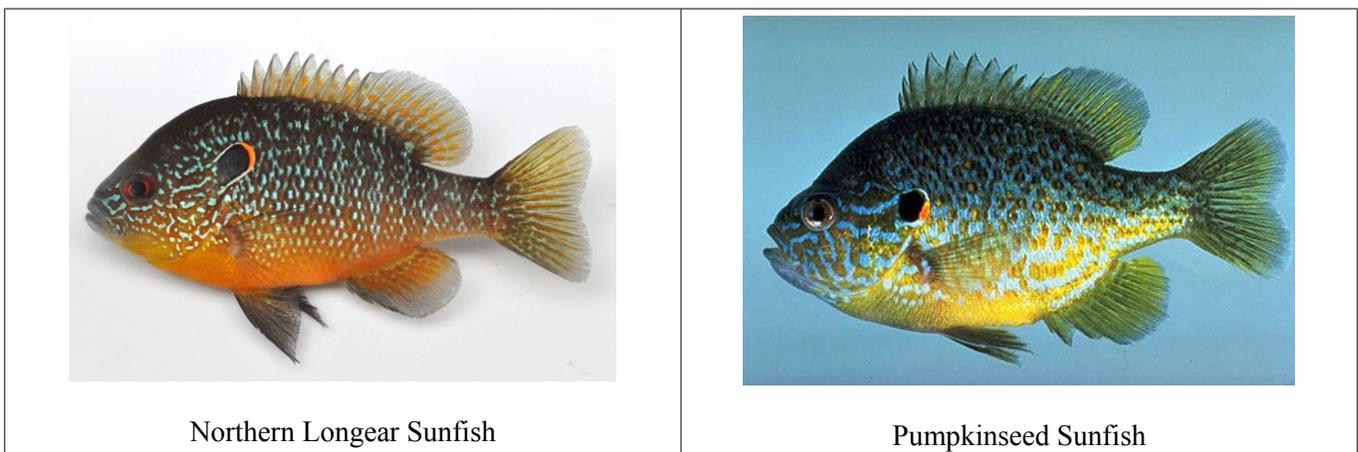


The Round Whitefish has a longer and thinner body when viewed in profile, whereas the Lake Whitefish appears larger in profile. When viewed head-on, the Round Whitefish has a very rounded “missile” shape, whereas the Lake Whitefish body is taller than it is wide, more like a bass. The pectoral fins of the Lake Whitefish have a larger surface area and are more rounded. The pelvic and second dorsal fins of the Lake Whitefish are more rounded and have a greater length of attachment to the body, whereas the second dorsal and pelvic fins of the Round Whitefish are pendant and trailing. The indentation of the tail in the Lake Whitefish is more rounded, while the indentation in the tail of the Round Whitefish is more acute.

Round Whitefish Fact Sheet: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26013.html>

Northern Longear Sunfish

The northern longear sunfish may be mistaken for a pumpkinseed sunfish.

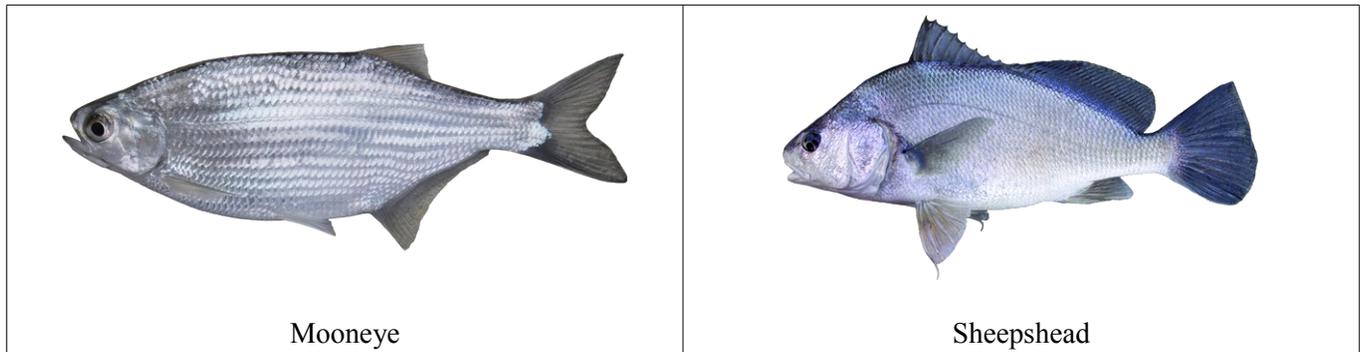


Key items to note are the much deeper depression in the dorsal fin of the Pumpkinseed, creating a double-hump or “camel-backed” appearance. The Longear sunfish has blue spots that create a speckled effect, while the Pumpkinseed has more of a chain pattern. The black ear patch on the pumpkinseed is more rounded, with an orange spot on the lower anterior surface, whereas the longear sunfish ear-patch is more rectangular, and the orange patch extends over the entirety of the upper-anterior end of the ear patch.

Longear Sunfish Fact Sheet: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26034.html>

Mooneye

The mooneye can grow up to 19", and may be mistaken for a sheepshead (aka Silver Drum).



The mooneye has a less prominent back ridge, and a rounded belly, whereas the sheepshead has a much flatter belly, and a humpbacked shape. The pelvic fin of the mooneye is small and pointed, whereas those of the sheepshead are far more prominent and sit farther on the body. The dorsal fin of the mooneye is smaller and sits farther back on the body, while the sheepshead has a prominent spiny first dorsal fin, and a large second dorsal fin that extends well back towards the tail. The tail of the mooneye is indented, while that of the sheepshead is semi-rounded. The mooneye may also be distinguished by one very unusual feature - the presence of teeth on its tongue.

Mooneye Fact Sheet: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26032.html>

Mud Sunfish

The Mud Sunfish may be mistaken for an immature Rock Bass.



The Mud Sunfish has a smaller, finer mouth and does not have the prominent lower lip or "sandpaper" teeth of the bass. The tail of the mud sunfish is rounded, whereas the tail of the rock bass is indented. The rock bass has a spiny and serrated anal fin. The mud sunfish has horizontal bars that run the length of the body, while the rock bass has a mottled appearance. Another clue is size, the largest Mud Sunfish ever caught was just over 8" long, and most never grow to be more than 6" long. Rock Bass may grow to over 12" in length.

Mud Sunfish Fact Sheet: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26029.html>

Banded Sunfish



Due to its very small size -adults average between 1.5” and 2.5” long- the banded sunfish isn't likely to be mistaken for an eating fish, however there have been cases of individuals attempting to add these fish to their aquariums and keep them as pets. It is illegal in New York State to keep any wild caught animal as a pet. Keeping a threatened or endangered animal species as a pet may result in both State and Federal wildlife trafficking charges.

Banded Sunfish fact sheet: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26043.html>

**This guide is a publication of the
Baldwinsville Public Library**

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April 10th, 2016

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