

KILLIFISH IN OREGON?

by Ray Katula, Amity, Oregon

Killifish in Oregon? Certainly not natural! The introduced Rainwater Killifish (Lucania parva), an Atlantic Coast native, has long been reported from Oregon's estuarine areas, but it now appears that one more species has made its residence here.

In late September of 1990, I was doing some sport fishing on Grand Island on the Willamette River when I noticed what appeared to be several young killifish swimming in shallow water among submerged terrestrial vegetation. Not really believing what I'd thought I'd seen, a return trip with collecting gear was in order.

With dip nets and minnow seines, it only took one scoop to determine that what I saw were indeed killifish, specifically the Banded Killifish, Fundulus diaphanus. This species ranges naturally throughout central and eastern North America in the more northern states. A subspecies, F.d. menona, inhabits the upper midwest.

Since I was unaware of any mention of this species' existence in Oregon, calls to several regional fisheries biologists were in order. They were not aware of this particular species' introduction, nor were they really surprised. Jay Massey, a regional fisheries biologist, Oregon Dept. of Wildlife, stated that many recent introductions have been products of aquarium and bait releases. That scenario seems unlikely in this case; live bait is not legal for fishing in Oregon, and the nearest native range of the Banded Killifish is eastern North Dakota. Of course, the aforementioned bait rule does not guarantee compliance by a fisherman who could purchase bait in a neighboring state, travel to Oregon, and release the "minnows" upon completion of their fishing excursion.

Oftimes non-native non-game fishes are introduced via an intentional gamefish introduction when species are intermixed in shipping containers. Eggs could also be attached to aquatic vegetation. Unless sale of Banded Killifish for bait is commonplace, I would argue that these unintentional introductions would be most plausible. In my many years in the Midwest where Banded Killies are native, I never saw them in a batch of bait minnows.

References

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- McGinnis, Samuel, 1983. How to Know the Freshwater Fishes of California.