

SOME ONTARIO CYPRINIDS

by Mark Klym, Sault-Ste. Marie, Ontario

Northern Ontario is an area covered and veined by numerous lakes, rivers, and streams; and our aquatic fauna is indeed highly diversified. Living in Algoma District--roughly at the junctions of Lakes Superior, Michigan, and Huron--presents innumerable collecting opportunities--not only in the Great Lakes and the St. Mary's River, but in the thousands of inland waterways and drainage ditches. In fact, within the city of Sault-Ste. Marie one can find almost any type of collecting site desired.

Probably our most common family of fish are the shiners and dace. Even these latter are present in great variety. One of my old favorites is the Blacknose Dace (Rhinichthys atratulus), a 2-3" fish with olive-green back, darkened spots on the side, and a light ventral surface. A dark band, from which the fish acquires its common name, runs across the nose and down both lateral edges to the caudal peduncle. In the aquarium, these fish are highly active, playfully battling mild currents and adapting to the new environment. They are an ideal fish for convincing a hesitant new arrival in the tank to eat. While most researchers say these fish prefer small, clear, swift streams with gravelly bottom, I have caught them in muddy water so thick that you couldn't see fish for mud in the bags!

Some other daces are very easily confused--notably the Northern Redbelly Dace (Phoxinus eos), Finescale Dace (Phoxinus neogaeus), and Pearl Dace (Semotilus margarita). I have heard numerous people tell of a 6" Northern Redbelly Dace, though well-versed writers state that these fish have a maximum size of 3"; the Pearl Dace, which resembles the Redbelly in some respects, is known to reach 5-6".

The Northern Redbelly Dace is a 2-3" fish, dark-olive to brown back, an appearance of two dark horizontal lines sandwiching a light to gold-metallic zone mid-laterally, and a ventral surface that may appear silvery, creamy yellow, or--in breeding males--brilliant red. In spawning color, the fins take on a yellowish tint. Females may become bright yellow during breeding season. These are active fish, and avid jumpers! Look for them in cool, quiet waters of a beaver pond, small lake, or pools in streams and rivers. They prefer a fine bottom.

The Finescale Dace is another 3" fish. It is dark-brown on the back, below which there is a sparsely pigmented area in which an olive-green or gold area surrounds a distinct lateral line the full length of the fish. There is a distinct caudal spot. The ventral portion is chrome yellow or brilliant red. To compound the confusion, Finescale, Northern Redbelly, and Pearl Dace are usually found together in cool bog lakes and streams.

The Pearl Dace (Semotilus margarita), the giant of this group, is 3-5", occasionally to 6". It has a dark back, silvery sides, and white belly. In Ontario these fish are usually densely spotted with dark patches. Small fish have a distinct lateral band terminating in a deep caudal spot. On older fish, the lateral band is present only in the caudal regions. From fall to mid-summer, males often have a rich orange-red hue on the ventral portion of the sides below the lateral line. This red, however, leaves a pale area on the ventral surface from the head to the anal fin, covering the ventral surface in the caudal region. They are found in ponds as well as cool headwaters of streams and small lakes.

Among the shiners found here we have the Common Shiner, Notropis cornutus, averaging about 4" in length. This fish is basically silvery with some bronze. They have an olive back and white belly. Spawning males' backs turn blue-black and the outer portions of fins become bright red. Found mainly in streams, they also occur in the clear inshore waters of lakes.

The Sand Shiner (Notropis stramineus) is a 3" fish, silvery with straw-colored tints. There is a thin mid-dorsal stripe in the nape-to-caudal region. The dark lateral line is distinct in the caudal, faint but present in the anterior portions of the fish. They are found in sparse vegetation in sandy lakes and large rivers.

The Emerald Shiner (Notropis atherinoides) is a 2-3" open-water fish found in large lakes or ponds. It is silvery with a blue-green iridescence on the sides and silvery white below. I have only found this species using a long-handled dip net above an 8' channel in open water in early evening.

These are just a few of Northern Ontario's cyprinids. I hope to learn of more and would enjoy company in exploring this region's lakes, rivers, and ponds.

#### Bibliography

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