

AIS

Aquatic Invasive Species

WALKING CATFISH



COMMON NAMES: Walking catfish, clarias catfish, freshwater catfish

This common name is given because of the fish's ability to "walk" from one water body to another during wet seasons using their pectoral fins.

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Clarias batrachus*

DISTRIBUTION: Native to southeastern Asia, including Eastern India, this species is present in the United States including: California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Nevada.

DESCRIPTION: Walking catfish are typically a shade of gray or gray-brown with many small white spots laterally. The head is flat and broad and the body tapers to the tail. This species of catfish is scaleless with four pair of barbels. The dorsal and anal fins are very long. Unlike our native catfishes, there is no adipose fin in the walking catfish. Albino and calico color variations are popular in the aquarium trade of this fish. Although some of these color morphs have been released into the wild, due to natural selection, wild populations found within the United States have usually reverted back to the natural gray/brown color of their ancestors.

LIFE CYCLE BIOLOGY: Reaching maturity at one year of age, this species is reported to reach a length of 24 inches in its native range. Walking catfish build nests of debris or submerged vegetation. The male guards the adhesive eggs and hatched young. Walking catfish feed on a variety of prey, including eggs or larvae of other fishes, small fishes,

and a number of crustaceans and insects. They are able to breathe air by means of an organ arising from the gill arches. The only area where well established populations are present and reproducing is the southern half of the Florida peninsula. Literature suggests that walking catfish cannot survive in water temperatures below approximately 50°F. If this is truly the case, walking catfish would not be able to tolerate Indiana's winters.

PATHWAYS/HISTORY: The walking catfish was imported to Florida, reportedly from Thailand, in the early 1960s for the aquarium trade. Introductions apparently occurred as early as the mid-1960s when adult fish imported as brood stock escaped via transport or from a fish farm. Walking catfish found in other regions of the United States are likely a result of aquarium releases.

DISPERSAL/SPREAD: In Florida, dispersal has occurred by way of the interconnected network of canals along the southeastern coastal region; however, spread was accelerated by overland migration, typically during rainy nights.

RISKS/IMPACTS: Walking catfish have a strong potential to be a pest due to their ability to migrate across land, and the fact that they feed on almost anything. They will compete with native fish for food and space. In Florida, walking catfish are known to have invaded aquaculture farms where these predators feed on fish stocks. Fish farmers have had to construct fences to protect ponds from invasion. In some areas of southern Florida, abundance estimates are in the neighborhood of 3,000 pounds of walking catfish per acre.

MANAGEMENT/PREVENTION: Walking catfish from the family Clariidae are on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service list of Injurious Wildlife Species. Under the Lacey Act, it is a violation of Federal law to import walking catfish or other Injurious Wildlife Species into the country without a permit. Indiana Administrative Code also lists exotic catfish from the family Clariidae illegal to possess live (312 IAC 9-6-7).

While it is suspected that walking catfish will not be able to survive Indiana winters, preventing the introduction of these fish into Indiana is the main management objective. There are a few things that you can do to help prevent introducing walking catfish and other invasive fish species:

- ✓ Learn how to correctly identify walking catfish and other invasive species.
- ✓ Do not release aquarium fish into the wild.
- ✓ If you have a walking catfish in an aquarium, it must be euthanized. IT IS THE LAW!
- ✓ Kill all walking catfish caught, do not release them alive.

Illustration by Greg Stevens, Coquille, Ore. with permission of The World newspaper, Coos Bay, Ore.



- ✓ Immediately report the sighting of walking catfish to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife and freeze the fish for identity verification.
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REFERENCES:

Biological Profiles: Walking Catfish.

<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/Gallery/Descript/WalkingCatfish/WalkingCatfish.html>

Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database. *Clarias batrachus*.

<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.asp?speciesID=486>

FishBase.org

<http://www.fishbase.org/Summary/SpeciesSummary.cfm?ID=3054&genusname=Clarias&speciesname=batrachus>

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