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Black Carp

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Black Carp

Invasive Species Program

What are black carp?

The black carp (*Mylopharyngodon piceus*) is a fish that inhabits large river and lake habitats and is native to most Pacific drainages in eastern Asia at the same latitudes as the United States. The black carp is also known as snail carp, Chinese black carp, black amur, Chinese roach, or black Chinese roach.

What do they look like?

Black carp is a blackish-brown fish with blackish-grey fins and an elongated and laterally compressed body. They can typically grow to more than 3 feet in length and weigh, on average, 33 pounds. The fish can reach 5 feet in length and weigh up to 150 pounds. Individuals of the species are known to live to at least 15 years of age. Young black carp are difficult to distinguish from young grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*), another non-native species. Adults may be distinguished

externally by the color and the more cylindrical form of the body, and internally by the pharyngeal teeth.

Where are they from?

The black carp inhabits most of the major waterways of eastern Asia. The natural range of black carp includes China, parts of far eastern Russia, and possibly northern Vietnam.

How Did They Get Here?

Black carp are currently being maintained in research and fish production facilities in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas. This species originally entered the United States in the early 1970's as a "contaminant" in imported grass carp stocks. Additional introductions occurred in the 1980's by fish farmers for yellow grub control and as a food fish. Even though black carp have been

in the United States for approximately 30 years, they have not been found in the wild.

What impacts would they have on our aquatic habitats?

If black carp escape, or are released into the wild, they will likely survive and/or become established and may likely spread throughout the United States. A close Asian relative with similar reproductive requirements, the grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*), has expanded into all of the lower 48 States except Montana and Vermont since its introduction into Arkansas and Alabama in 1963.

Black carp are molluscivores (mussel and snail feeders) but also eat freshwater shrimp, crawfish, and insects. At all life stages, black carp will compete for food with native species. If introduced or established, black carp are likely to have a considerable impact on



native mussel and snail populations. Native fish, turtles, birds, including waterfowl, and vertebrates, such as raccoons, otters, and muskrats, are likely to be affected through competition for food.

In addition to the threat of their predatory behavior and its resulting impacts, the black carp may also have other impacts on our aquatic ecosystems including:

- *Transfer of Pathogens*—Black carp host many parasites and flukes, as well as bacterial and viral diseases that are likely to infect sport, food, or threatened and endangered fish species.

- *Risk to Threatened and Endangered species*—Black carp have the potential to negatively affect threatened and endangered mollusks, fish, turtles, and birds that rely on mollusks as a food source. Based on its dietary habits, the black carp is likely to invade the habitat, feed on, and further threaten most of the federally listed freshwater mussels and about one-third of the federally listed aquatic snails, as well as numerous potential candidates for Federal protection.

If black carp become established in North American ecosystems, their feeding habits could drastically modify the ecological balance and forever change our native aquatic systems. These changes would affect the aesthetic, recreational, and economic values currently provided by native mollusks and healthy ecosystems. Educational values would also be diminished through the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem health.

What is the Service doing about black carp?

The mission of the Service is, working with others, to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Under the authority of the Lacey Act, the Service is in the process of listing black carp as an injurious wildlife species. Essentially, this listing would prohibit the importation and interstate transport of black carp. After analyzing scientific data, the Service deemed that this action is necessary to protect the interests of human beings, wildlife and wildlife resources from the purposeful or accidental introduction of black carp into the ecosystems of the United States.

What are the negative impacts of this ruling?

As part of the analysis conducted by the Service, a cost-benefit analysis was included. The data show that there is a trade-off between damage avoided by not letting more black carp into the U.S. and the economic benefits received by the sectors that sell and use this fish. The potential damage that could be done by black carp if they become established in U.S. waters would significantly outweigh their benefits.

For More Information

For more information, please contact:

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- <http://contaminants.fws.gov/Issues/InvasiveSpecies.cfm>

- <http://www.anstaskforce.gov>

- <http://www.protectyourwaters.net>

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- <http://www.fcsc.usgs.gov/>



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All users of our aquatic resources, whether for recreation or for aquatic related businesses and industries, should become knowledgeable about the aquatic invasive species issue.

*Recently, the FWS unveiled its new **Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!** social marketing and public awareness campaign that targets public awareness about the aquatic invasive species issue and empower recreational users to become part of the solution in preventing the spread of these species to affected waters, **Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!** is a national campaign that is a multi-organizational effort involving the entire conservation community.*

*If you have Internet access and would like to learn more about this campaign, go to the **Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!** web site, at:*

www.protectyourwaters.net

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1 800_344_WILD
<http://www.fws.gov>

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