

Bluegill – *Lepomis macrochirus*

Distribution – Originally, restricted to western and central North America where it ranged from coastal Virginia to Florida, west to Texas and northern Mexico, and north from western Minnesota to western New York. Today found in all states and is widely distributed. Appearance varies considerably among individuals, as is true with most sunfish. Most bluegill are light to dark olive, though older fish may have a purplish tinge. Cheeks and gill covers are often bluish and the ear flap is black. The rearward edge of the soft portion of the dorsal fin carries a dark blotch. Breeding males are marked by bright blue and orange. Females and younger fish are less colorful and are often marked by dark vertical bars on their olive backs. Though they occasionally exceed a pound, an 8-inch bluegill is considered large.

Food Habits - The bluegill's mouth is small; it feeds mostly on aquatic insects and other small invertebrates. Young bluegill will feed in heavy weeds to avoid predators. Bluegill large enough to be of no interest to bass often swim freely in more open water, feeding heavily on tiny drifting zooplankton. This open-water feeding is especially common if bluegill must compete with pumpkinseed and green sunfish, which stay in the weeds. When food is scarce, bluegill will eat their own eggs.

Life History - Bluegill spawn from late May or through much of the summer in water temperatures of 67 to 80 degrees. Male bluegill fan out a nest in firm-bottomed shallows often within a colony of dozens of other nests. A single female can deposit more than 50,000 eggs. The male then guards eggs and fry.

Life Span – The average bluegill lives from 5 – 6 years.

Sport Fishing - The bluegill provide great sport especially when using ultra-light to light tackle. The species also provide a good introduction to angling for kids!

Threats – Pollution and habitat loss are the most important threats. Its pretty hard to over fish bluegill, however, heavy fishing pressure removes most of the larger individuals from the population.