

Flier

Centrarchus macropterus



PHOTO BY KONRAD SCHMIDT

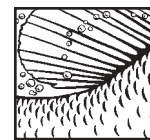


Fliers live in the quiet, acidic and dark-stained waters of East Texas. These little sunfish can put up a great fight when caught on an angler's line.

Northern Pineywoods

Flier

Centrarchus macropterus



APPEARANCE

Length: 5 inches (12.7 cm), but can grow to 7 inches (17.8 cm)

Weight: 3 ounces (85g)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Olive-green back
- Greenish-yellow to cream-colored sides with several rows of brown spots
- Dark streak below each eye
- Deep, round body
- Wing-like fins, hence the common name “flier”
- *Anal fin* (underside of fish in front of tail fin) almost equal in size to *dorsal* (back) fin

LIFE HISTORY

Range: Southeastern United States and extreme East Texas

Diet: Insects, snails, worms, leeches, small fish and phytoplankton

Predators: Larger fish, turtles, snakes and wading birds

Sexual maturity: At one year

Spawning season: In March, when water temperatures reach 62° to 68° F (16° to 20° C)

Nests: Males construct disc-shaped nests by fanning their tails and removing silt and debris from nest sites.

Eggs: 20,000 to 35,000 eggs

Young: Males guard the nest until the young hatch. Juvenile fliers have a large dark spot encircled in orange on the soft rays of the dorsal fin. The spot vanishes with age.

Life span: Up to five years

HABITAT

Fliers prefer clear, acidic waters such as swamp ponds, sloughs, oxbows, slow-moving creeks and steams, with heavy vegetation and an average water temperature of 75° to 85° F (23° to 29° C).

BEHAVIOR

Males guard eggs and newly hatched fry from intruders. When frightened or alarmed, fliers seek refuge in aquatic vegetation, submerged tree roots or mats of floating vegetation. This reaction is part of what makes them such fighters, and why anglers sometimes like to fish for them.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- Fliers are sometimes confused with black crappie because the size and shapes of small crappie are similar.
- The flier is one of 174 freshwater fish species in Texas and one of 18 species of sunfish.

FLIERS AND PEOPLE

Some people like to fish for fliers because their meat is sweet and good to eat while others like to keep fliers in large aquariums because of their beauty. It is speculated that fliers have been accidentally introduced into small lakes and ponds outside their native habitat when people release them from aquariums. Generally this is not a good practice, however scientists are watching to see how these fish compete with native fish for available resources. In time, they will determine whether or not introduced fliers will cause problems in their new habitats.