Lota (whisker) on chin. Sometimes seen attached to salmon or the side of a fish, chews a small hole, its snake
This invasive species is recognized by Sea Lamprey under the head and behind 4 fish in Lake Michigan. Mouth is lakefront, it is now rare. Largest Once common along the Chicago Acipenser fulvescens Lake Sturgeon - like body and circular mouth. 4 feet. Recognized by its snake most people realize. Hides in debris along the shoreline. Rarely seen, it this fish swims thousands of Born in the Atlantic Ocean, Anguilla rostrata American Eel - like edge. 10 inches. This minnow is recognized by having a short barbel in the back corner of its mouth. 8 inches. This invasive species is recognized by having a long snout that causes its fish to swim past it without even knowing it was there. A small surf along the lakeshore. Many beach votes the official fish of the City of Chicago, it swims in the lakefront. It is an important part of the local food chain. Difficult thousands along Chicago’s lakeshore. Eaten by larger very common along the Chicago lakefront. It is some wander into the shallows of Lake Michigan. This species is a an important part of the local food chain. Difficult to identify, black marks along the side form a row of “+” signs. 3 inches. Beachie Congerous Austi should seek sheltered bays or move farther out. This invasive species is a rainbow trout / steelhead. Recognized by having an adipose fin 3 inches. Sand Shiner Notropis stramineus This small, silvery minnow can be found by the thousands along Chicago’s lakeshores. Eaten by larger 10 inches. This invasive species is a popular sport fish. Identified by having an adipose fin and a relatively large mouth. 10 inches. Common Carp Cyprinus carpio This invasive species is recognized by having an adipose fin and a relatively large mouth. 10 inches. Banded Killifish Fundulus diaphanus This small hydrodynamic fish cruises the open waters of Vertical bars along its side. 3 inches. American Eel Anguilla rostrata Born in the Atlantic Ocean, this fish swims thousands of miles to reach Chicago’s shoreline. Rarely seen, it hides in debris along the bottom. More common than most people realize. Recognized by having a whisker-like body and normal mouth. 4 feet. Lake Trout Salvelinus namaycush The largest native trout / salmon in Lake Michigan. Popularly introduced in the mid 19th century, but is now slowly recovering. This popular sport fish has an adipose fin and gray-green sides with white spots and upajugate makes. 4 feet. Brown Trout Salmo trutta An invasive species that is a popular sport fish. Characterized by an adipose fin and dark spots along the back and tail. Inside of mouth white. Rainbow Trout have a bluish-red stripe along the side. Steheads are individuals that live in Lake Michigan and lack the red stripe, as in the picture above. 3 feet. channel catfish Ictalurus punctatus A popular sport fish that lives on the bottom, like 8 barbels which extend over the edge of the fish. Identified by having black spots on the side, although larger individuals are darker and the spots are obscured. 3 feet. Rainbow Smelt Osmerus mordax An invasive species that was once an abundant sport fish, but is now declining in numbers. Still found in local restaurants and grocery stores. A slender, silver fish with an adipose fin and a relatively large mouth. 10 inches. Lake Trout Salvelinus namaycush The largest native trout / salmon in Lake Michigan. Popularly introduced in the mid 19th century, but is now slowly recovering. This popular sport fish has an adipose fin and gray-green sides with white spots and upajugate makes. 4 feet. Bloater Coregonus hoyi An invasive species that is a popular sport fish. 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Mottled Sculpin  
_Cottus bairdii_  
This fish used to live on the bottom within the cracks and crevices of rocks and rubble along Chicago’s lakefront, but its numbers have been devastated by the invasive Round Goby. It has no scales, a relatively wide head when viewed from above, and 2 pelvic fins, 5 inches.

Rock Bass  
_Ambloplites rupestris_  
A popular sport fish among some, it is most easily recognized by square black blotches on the side and red eyes. Not a picky eater, it is usually easy to catch with a baited hook. 11 inches.

Freshwater Drum  
_Aplodinotus grunniens_  
A very sturdy, solidly built fish that lives along the bottom feeding on mussels and minnows. It is a good fighter. A single disk, 4 inches, the length of the back, and a tail that is not forked. 2 feet.

Pumpkinseed  
_Lepomis gibbosus_  
A beautiful sunfish with a black “ear flap” rimmed with white and a red spot. During the summer, they are often seen along the Chicago lakefront in shallow water. A male clears a 1 to 2 foot circular area of vegetation and debris, then a female lays eggs in the center of the circle. The male guards this nest from other nosediving fishes, coyfishes, etc. 8 inches.

Pompeii Cod  
_Pompeius saltatrix_  
A very popular sport fish whose numbers seem to be increasing along the Chicago lakefront. Some think they are doing well because they are eating lots of the invasive Round Goby. Its mouth does not extend past the eye and it usually has several vertical bars along its sides. 2 feet.

Smoothes Bass  
_Micropterus dolomieu_  
A very popular sport fish whose numbers seem to be increasing along the Chicago lakefront. Some think they are doing well because they are eating lots of the invasive Round Goby. Its mouth does not extend past the eye and it usually has several vertical bars along its sides. 2 feet.

Bluegill  
_Lepomis macrochirus_  
A sunfish with a completely black “ear flap” and several thin vertical bars along the sides. Usually easy to catch with a baited hook. During the summer, they are often seen along the Chicago lakefront in shallow water. A male clears a 1 to 2 foot circular area of vegetation and debris, then a female lays eggs in the center of the circle. The male guards this nest from other marauding fishes, crayfishes, etc. 1 foot.

Largemouth Bass  
_Micropterus salmoides_  
A very popular sport fish. Individuals seem to be getting larger along the Chicago lakefront, and some think this is because they are eating lots of the invasive Round Goby. Usually has a black stripe extending from the eye to the tail, but this can be obscured in darker older adults. Mouth extends past the eye in adults, but not necessarily so in juveniles. 2 feet.

Yellow Perch  
_Perca flavescens_  
One of the most sought after fish along the Chicago lakefront. A very popular sport fish. Individuals seem to be getting larger along the Chicago lakefront, and some think this is because they are eating lots of the invasive Round Goby. Identified by its yellowish color, several dark bars along its sides, and two fins on the back. 1 foot.

Round Goby  
_Neogobius melanostomus_  
Invasive species that has recently become abundant in Lake Michigan. Usually associated with local rivers, it seems to be becoming more common in Lake Michigan. And larger individuals keep appearing. A popular sport fish recognized by its streamlined shape, two fins on its back, and a white blotch on the bottom tail tip. 2 ½ feet.

Walleye  
_Sander vitreus_  
Usually associated with local rivers, it seems to be becoming more common in Lake Michigan. And larger individuals keep appearing. A popular sport fish recognized by its streamlined shape, two fins on its back, and a white blotch on the bottom tail tip. 2 ½ feet.

Freshwater Drum  
_Aplodinotus grunniens_  
A very sturdy, solidly built fish that lives along the bottom feeding on mussels and minnows. It is a good fighter. A single disk, 4 inches, the length of the back, and a tail that is not forked. 2 feet.

From the dark depths of Lake Michigan to the mouth of the Chicago River, over 70 species of fishes make their home. Some are so common that anyone fishing Chicago’s lakefront would recognize them. Others are so rare that few people have encountered them alive in Chicago. Many others are overlooked despite their importance to Lake Michigan’s ecology.

This field guide covers 30 representative fish species that live along Chicago’s lakefront. There is an image (or two) of each species as well as interesting facts and key features to help identify them. The indicated lengths are near maximum for each species within the Great Lakes. Most individuals are smaller than the length that is given.

Please enjoy using this field guide to learn more about our Lake Michigan neighbors living beneath the waves along Chicago’s lakefront.

**Basic fish anatomy diagram:**

[Diagram of fish anatomy]

This field guide was made possible by the generous support of Patricia and Richard Schnadig and Marlene Phillips.

All images by Philip Willink, except Alewife, Rainbow Trout, Chinook Salmon, and Brown Trout by Frank Veraldi.

2010

Chicago Lakefront Fishes  
By Philip Willink  
The Field Museum, Chicago, IL