

REDEAR SUNFISH

Lepomis microlophus



Photo 1. A mature redear sunfish.

Also called shell cracker, redear are dark olive with light green to silver sides. They have a compressed body and can weigh up to 2 pounds. There is a short, black ear flap with an orange-red colored dot on the tip.

Urban Redear Sunfish

Redear sunfish are found in retention ponds, which are located in subdivisions to prevent flooding, and are introduced by means of other wildlife, such as birds, or human introduction.

Habitat

Redear sunfish have been introduced widely throughout the United States and their range spans from Texas to Indiana, with two-thirds of Texas considering them a native species. They inhabit warm, slow-moving freshwater with large amounts of aquatic vegetation. Rarely approaching surface waters and staying close to the pond floor, redear build concentrated nesting sites in sand or gravel during warmer months for spawning. They received their nickname from having specialized throat muscles and teeth strong enough to crush shells, and then spit them out, allowing them to primarily feed on snails, crustaceans, and snails.



Photo 2. Typical retention pond found in subdivisions.

Role in the Ecosystem

Consuming snails is beneficial to other fish because it can potentially disrupt parasitic life cycles and reduce snail-borne parasitic outbreaks. Common parasitic worms found in snails consumed by redear can infect musculature and weaken immune systems of larger, targeted gamefish. Whereas, consumption of snails does not negatively impact redear.

Redear are also considered to be adequate prey for largemouth bass and can be stocked along with bluegill.

Be a Good Neighbor

Redear can end up being targeted sportfish during spawning because nesting sites are colonized. Compared to other sunfishes, reproduction is limited so in order to maintain a steady population most nesting sites should be left undisturbed.

Native aquatic vegetation should be maintained to promote a healthy food chain. Vegetation can support habitat for offspring. If redear are being used as a forage species for larger gamefish, vegetation should be controlled to reduce predator avoidance.



Photo 3. A juvenile redear sunfish.

Be Aware!

Snails make their own way into a water system and can be detrimental so they should not be introduced in the hopes of increasing food availability.

Photo 1. Dr. Todd Sink, Associate Professor & Aquaculture Specialist. Texas A&M AgriLife

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