

Identification of Blue, Channel, and Flathead Catfish

In the past, blue catfish have been stocked in Kansas reservoirs to provide trophy opportunities to anglers. Recently, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks stocked blue catfish in El Dorado Reservoir in an attempt to control zebra mussel populations. Channel catfish are commonly stocked in small impoundments, such as community and urban lakes. Flathead catfish, while not stocked by the department, are found statewide especially in streams and rivers. All three of the catfish species listed below are native to at least part of the state.

It is important that anglers be able to identify what type of catfish they catch because length limits on blue, channel and flathead catfish can differ in a given body of water. During spawning, male channel catfish adopt a blue color and can be mistaken for blue catfish by anglers. Juvenile (fish 12 inches or under) channel catfish are the only catfish that have black or brown spots. The information below identifies additional key characteristics needed to identify these three fish.

BLUE

color often pale blue, although white or dark blue and black not uncommon. small head followed by distinct hump in younger fish.

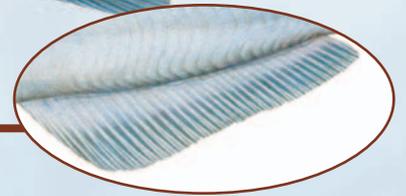
Lower jaw even with upper jaw

weights of over 100 pounds reported



forked tail

anal fin longer with 30-35 supporting rays with flat edge



CHANNEL

color often brownish-yellow with white belly, juveniles have black or brown spots, spawning males may be dark blue in color

Lower jaw even with upper jaw

weights rarely over 30 pounds recorded



forked tail

anal fin shorter with less than 30 supporting rays with round edge



FLATHEAD

color often mottled brown/black and pale yellow

Lower jaw extends beyond upper jaw

weights of over 100 pounds reported



no forked tail (square)

anal fin shorter with less than 30 supporting rays with round edge

Artwork by Joseph R. Tomelleri

