

## WALLEYE AND SAUGER FACTS

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### Description

The walleye, named for its opaque eye, is the largest member of the perch family and may be distinguished from its cousin, the sauger, by a dark blotch on the lower corner of the spiny dorsal fin. The sauger has rows of black half moon shaped spots on the same fin. The walleye often has a light colored tip on the lower lobe of its tail fin. Typical body colors of both fish are brassy olive-buff mottled with black or brown along the top and sides and a whitish belly sometimes tinged with green. Other names for the walleye include pike, walleyed-pike, grass or yellow pike, pike perch, jack salmon, and dore or dory. The sauger is sometimes called a sand pike, river pike, spot-fin pike, jack fish, or jack salmon.

### Distribution

Walleye are found primarily in large rivers and streams of northern Illinois. Largest populations are in the Mississippi, Rock, and Kankakee Rivers. Smaller numbers occur in the Fox Chain-O-Lakes region and in some strip-mine lakes.

Largest sauger populations occur in the Mississippi River, but it is also found in other rivers in northern and central Illinois. More sauger than walleye are caught in the Mississippi, whereas walleye predominate elsewhere.

### Habitat

Both do best in large rivers with clear swift water or deep weedless lakes with clean bottoms of gravel, rock, sand or hard clay. Best walleye populations occur in large windswept moderately fertile lakes with feeding grounds consisting of shoals, bars, and shallows. A rock-gravel shoreline is necessary for spawning

Sauger prefer large rivers, and there is evidence that it is more tolerant to muddy or murky conditions than the walleye.

### Reproduction

Male walleye reach sexual maturity when two to three years old and between 12-13.5 inches long. Females mature when four to five years old and 15-17 inches in length. Sauger are usually old enough to reproduce when three to four years old and 13 inches long.

Small males are the first to seek spawning areas shortly after the ice melts (March - April) and when the water warms up to 38 - 44 degrees F. Spawning reaches its peak when the water is between 45 to 50 degrees. One or more males accompany a female to the spawning area where the eggs are deposited at random over a rocky or gravel bottom in water one to four feet deep.

Walleye lay thirty-five thousand to six hundred thousand eggs; sauger, thirty-two thousand to eighty-three thousand. Fertilized eggs are left unattended and hatch in twelve to eighteen days at a water temperature of 50 degrees F. Young are also left uncared for.

In some hatcheries, eggs are fertilized artificially and hatched in jars. Newly hatched fry must be stocked immediately into desirable areas, as cannibalism develops rapidly in hatchery troughs and almost complete losses can result.

### Food Habits

Fingerlings feed first on tiny crustaceans, then insect larvae. At two to three inches, they begin to feed on small fish. Adult walleye and sauger are mainly fish-eaters, usually feeding in schools on minnows and other small fish. Both are gluttonous eaters and feed by sight. When necessary, they can overtake other fish and often eat their own kind. Also on the menu are crayfish, frogs, snails and large aquatic insects.

At night, particularly during midsummer, they feed along the shoreline or on bars and shoals, but as daylight comes, they move to deeper water and continue to feed. Both species feed throughout the winter.

### Growth

The walleye attains a maximum length of about three feet and a weight of about twenty-five pounds. The hook and line record for Illinois is 12 pounds 2 ounces and was taken from the Kankakee River in 1956. Average size caught is one to three pounds.

In Illinois, the biggest sauger stretch out to about twenty-five inches and weigh three to four pounds. There is no hook and line record for this state but sauger up to seven pounds have been reported elsewhere. Average size caught is 0.5 to one pound.

Females grow faster and larger and live longer than males. Average life span for walleye is ten to twelve years, but some have reached eighteen to twenty years of age. Sauger are more slow-growing and have a shorter life span than the walleye.

is especially true during spring, the spawning migration, and again in the fall. Baitcasting with live bait across the current and near the bottom in the tailwater area below locks and dams provide the bulk of the walleye and sauger caught in the Mississippi River. Spincasting also is an effective method of taking these fish below dams. Walleye are occasionally caught by ice fishermen.

## Approximate Average Growth Rate in United States

### Walleye

Age - Years:	1	2	3	4	5
Length - Inches:	8.1	11.7	14.0	16.1	18.1
Weight - Lbs. & oz.:	3 oz.	9 oz.	15 oz.	1# 7 oz.	2#
Age - Years:	6	7	8	9	10
Length - Inches:	18.9	21.2	22.5	23.5	24.9
Weight - Lbs. & oz.:	2# 5 oz.	3# 6 oz.	3# 14 oz.	4# 8 oz.	5# 5 oz.

### Sauger

Age - Years:	1	2	3	4	5
Length - Inches:	6.6	7.7	10.4	12.5	13.7
Weight - Lbs. & oz.:	2 oz.	3 oz.	8 oz.	11 oz.	13 oz.
Age - Years:	6	7	8	9	
Length - Inches:	14.2	15.0	15.5	16.7	
Weight - Lbs. & oz.:	15 oz.	1# 3 oz.	1# 4 oz.	1# 10 oz.	

### Stocking

Introduction in Illinois has generally proven unsuccessful because of the limited number of areas with suitable habitat. Being "big water fish," walleye and sauger are not at home in small lakes and ponds. When placed in such lakes and ponds, there is little chance walleye and sauger will reproduce, and there is a good possibility they will compete with and reduce the more desirable population of largemouth or smallmouth bass.

### Desirability

The flesh of walleye and sauger is white, firm and delicious. They provide excellent sport for the fisherman who knows their habits, spawning and feeding grounds, but they are not an easy fish to catch the year around.

### Angling

In lakes, walleye are generally taken by trolling in the daytime in deep water near the bottom. Best baits are minnows, minnow-spinner combinations, spinners, night crawlers, worms, frogs, crayfish or artificial lures. Still fishing in deep water with live bait can be very effective, but trolling is the preferred method. During twilight hours and after dark, baitcasting with either live bait or artificial plugs or spoons; spincasting with small plugs or spinners; and fly casting with streamer flies or poppers in the shallower feeding and spawning areas can be most productive. This