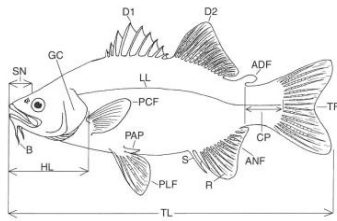


# Live Bait Fish Identification Key

How to use key: if fish matches all conditions of 1a go to 2a. If fish does not match condition 1a go to 1b. Follow key until fish species is found. Visually compare key results with fish sketch and pictures on opposite side of key. Approved live bait species are underlined. Be responsible, DO NOT USE as live bait if you cannot identify the fish!



## IMAGINARY FISH SHOWING EXTERNAL FEATURES (no fish has all of these features)

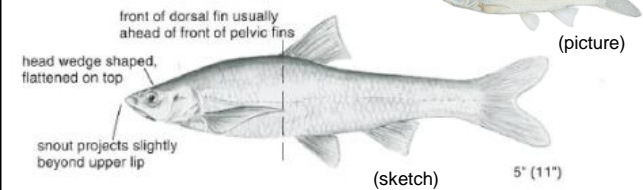
- |                                |                               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ADF — Adipose fin              | LL — Lateral line             |
| ANF — Anal fin                 | PAP — Pelvic axillary process |
| B — Barbel                     | PCF — Pectoral fin            |
| CP — Caudal peduncle           | PLF — Pelvic fin              |
| D1 — First dorsal fin (spines) | R — Ray                       |
| D2 — Second dorsal fin (rays)  | S — Spine                     |
| GC — Gill cover                | SN — Snout                    |
| HL — Head length               | TF — Tail fin or caudal fin   |
|                                | TL — Total length             |

- 1a. dorsal fin with less than 10 rays (R) - not counting spines.....go to 2 (minnows)
- 1b. dorsal fin with 10 or more rays.....go to 17 (suckers)
- 2a. first dorsal fin ray spiny and/or serrated like steak knife.....DO NOT USE.....**Common Carp or Goldfish**
- 2b. first dorsal fin ray without pointed spine.....go to 3
- 3a. external barbels present in corner of mouth.....go to 4
- 3b. no barbels or flaplike-barbel hidden in groove of upper lip.....go to 8
- 4a. upper lip and jaw are connected without a groove.....**Longnose Dace**
- 4b. groove between upper lip and jaw.....go to 5
- 5a. pectoral fin tip pointed or .....go to 6
- 5b. pectoral fin tip rounded .....**Lake Chub**
- 6a. snout extends far beyond upper lip ..... DO NOT USE.....**Sturgeon Chub**
- 6b. snout extends slightly beyond upper lip .....go to 7
- 7a. dorsal and anal fins highly curved ; rounded snout ..... DO NOT USE.....**Sicklefin Chub**
- 7b. dorsal and anal fins not curved ; pointed snout—head wedged shaped .....**Flathead Chub**
- 8a. black spot near base of dorsal fin ; mouth extends beyond front of eye .....**Creek Chub**
- 8b. no black spot near base of dorsal fin.....go to 9
- 9a. anal fin length (a) at base greater than depth of caudal peduncle (b) ; body laterally compressed.....go to 10
- 9b. anal fin length (a) at base less than depth of caudal peduncle (b);.....go to 11
- 10a. long narrow body; large eye.....**Emerald Shiner**
- 10b. deep body; decurved lateral line ; golden silvery in color..... DO NOT USE.....**Golden Shiner**

- 11a. dorsal fin origin behind pelvic fin origin ..... DO NOT USE.....**Northern Redbelly Dace, Pearl Dace, or Northern Redbelly Finescale Dace hybrid**
- 11b. dorsal fin origin in-front of pelvic fin origin .....go to 12
- 12a. prominent dark spot at base of caudal fin ..... DO NOT USE.....**Spottail Shiner**
- 12b. no prominent dark spot at base of caudal fin.....go to 13
- 13a. lateral line with "===" marks ..... DO NOT USE.....**Sand Shiner**
- 13b. lateral line without "===" marks.....go to 14
- 14a. snout projects beyond upper lip .....go to 15
- 14b. snout does not project beyond upper lip ; dark vertical line often present at base of caudal fin ; top of dorsal fin rounded; breeding males with fat head and tubercles (bumps on head).....**Fathead Minnow**
- 15a. color brassy or greenish; dorsal fin tip slightly rounded ; 1st ray shorter than 2nd & 3rd rays; body stout; head short; sides usually with a dusky stripe..... DO NOT USE.....**Brassy Minnow**
- 15b. dorsal fin tip pointed (may be difficult to see w/o a magnifying glass) ; 1st ray usually as long or longer than 2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> rays.....go to 16
- 16a. eye small (diameter < 1/5 head length); translucent skin covering front half of belly; belly surface often yellowish.....**Plains Minnow**
- 16b. eye large (diameter > 1/5 head length); body stout; opaque skin covering back half of belly; color silvery; scales large.....**Western Silvery Minnow**
- 17a. dorsal fin long and sickle shaped ..... DO NOT USE.....**Blue Sucker, River Carpsucker, Bigmouth Buffalo & Smallmouth Buffalo**
- 17b. dorsal fin short and not sickle shaped .....go to 18
- 18a. rear margin of lower lip nearly straight ; caudal fin generally bright red..... DO NOT USE.....**Shorthead Redhorse Sucker**
- 18b. rear margin of lower lip concave ; forming a distinct angle.....go to 19
- 19a. snout projecting well beyond upper lip; small scales along body .....go to 20
- 19b. snout barely projects beyond upper lip ; lip with numerous wart-like bumps.....**White Sucker**
- 20a. very large mouth, distinct notch on each side between upper and lower lips ..... DO NOT USE.....**Mountain Sucker**
- 20b. no distinct notch between upper and lower lips; fine scales; snout very long.....**Longnose Sucker**

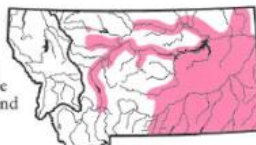
Approved live bait species list : fathead minnow, flathead chub, western silvery minnow\*, plains minnow\*, emerald shiner\*, longnose dace, lake chub, creek chub, longnose sucker, and white sucker.  
\* = not allowed at Tongue River Reservoir or river upstream of reservoir.

**FLATLEAF CHUB**  
*Platygobio gracilis*



**COLOR:** Very silvery, shading to brown or dusky on back.

**OTHER CHARACTERISTICS:** Mouth large with a conspicuous barbel at each corner. Pectoral fin sickle shaped with a long, sharply pointed tip that may extend almost to front of pelvic fin.



**LONGNOSE DACE**  
*Rhinichthys cataractae*

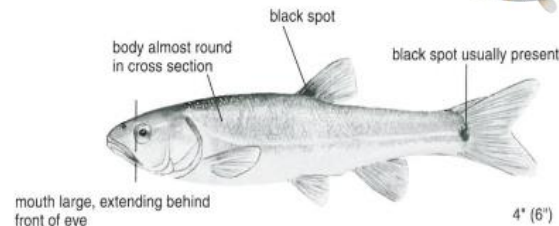


**COLOR:** Back olive to black, shading to white or yellow underneath. Sides may have dark blotches. Breeding males have reddish orange on head and fins. Juveniles have a black midside stripe starting at the tip of the snout and ending at the base of the tail fin. Adults often have a dark stripe ahead of eye.

**OTHER CHARACTERISTICS:** Small barbel at each corner of mouth.

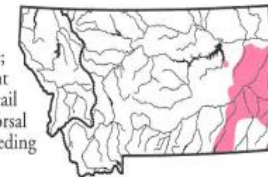


**CREEK CHUB**  
*Semotilus atromaculatus*

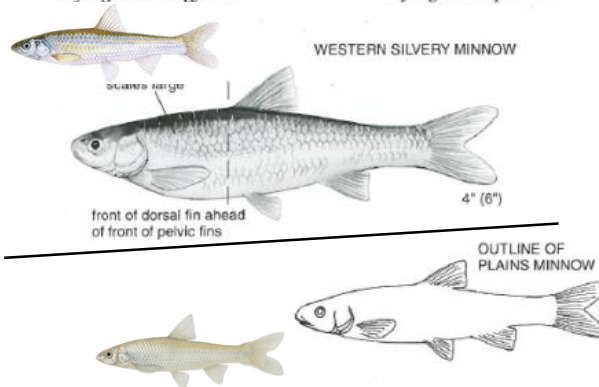


**OTHER NAME:** Horned Dace.

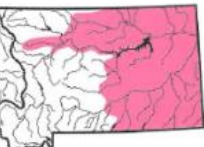
**COLOR:** Overall silvery, often with purple iridescence; back olive; underside white. Young have a prominent dark midside band extending from tip of snout to tail fin; band fades on older fish. Black spot at front of dorsal fin base may be vague in immature specimens. Breeding males usually have a reddish cast.



**WESTERN SILVERY MINNOW and PLAINS MINNOW**  
*Hybognathus argyritis* and *Hybognathus placitus*



Because they are very similar, the Plains Minnow and Western Silvery Minnow are treated together. The Plains is more streamlined than the Western Silvery (see illustrations above). Also, the Plains has 15 to 22 scales across the belly from lateral line to lateral line, compared with the Western Silvery's 11 to 17. Nevertheless, there is no sure method for telling live specimens apart. Dead specimens can be identified by inspecting a bone at the base of the skull and the muscles attached to it. These features are clearly illustrated in William L. Pfleger, *The Fishes of Missouri*, Missouri Dept. of Conserv., 1975, pp. 107-108; or 1991 revision, pp. 107-108.



Montana distribution of Western Silvery Minnow and Plains Minnow

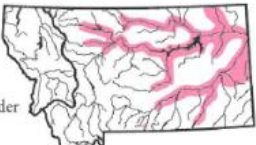
**COLOR:** Overall very silvery; back dusky or yellowish olive, underside white.

**EMERALD SHINER**  
*Notropis atherinoides*

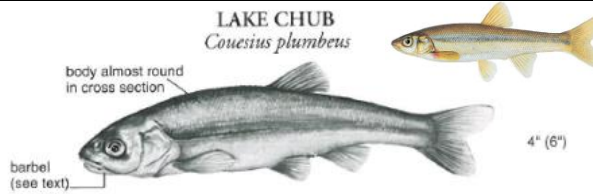


**COLOR:** Overall silvery with iridescent light-green back. Usually has an emerald green or silvery midside stripe, particularly toward the rear. Young are somewhat translucent.

**OTHER CHARACTERISTICS:** Eye large. Body slender and flat sided, fragile looking. Scales easily rubbed off.



**LAKE CHUB**  
*Couesius plumbeus*

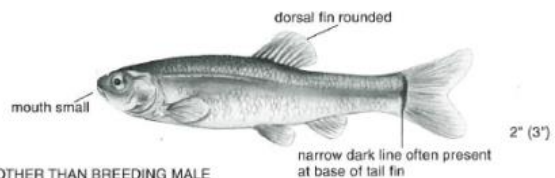


**COLOR:** Silver gray overall, dusky on back, underside whitish. A midside band is present but often indistinct. Scattered dark scales may be present, giving a speckled appearance. Breeding males develop reddish patches, particularly on the pectoral fin bases.

**OTHER CHARACTERISTICS:** A well-developed, rounded barbel is located slightly above each corner of the mouth.



**FATHEAD MINNOW**  
*Pimephales promelas*



**ADULT OTHER THAN BREEDING MALE**



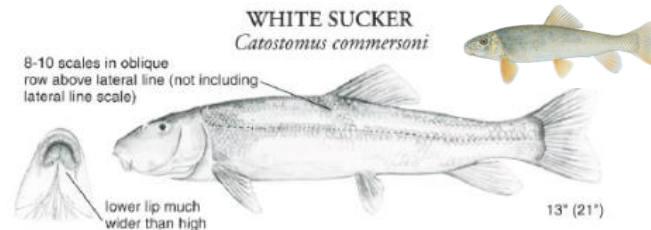
**BREEDING MALE**

**COLOR:** Back dark olive or brown, sides dusky, pale below. Young are lighter and have a dark midside band. Breeding males nearly black with two light blotches.

**OTHER CHARACTERISTICS:** Body of adult is stout. Lateral line usually incomplete. Scales ahead of dorsal fin are small and crowded. First ray of dorsal fin is short, thick, and blunt—not easily seen on females and young.



**WHITE SUCKER**  
*Catostomus commersoni*



**OTHER NAMES:** Common Sucker, Coarsescale Sucker.

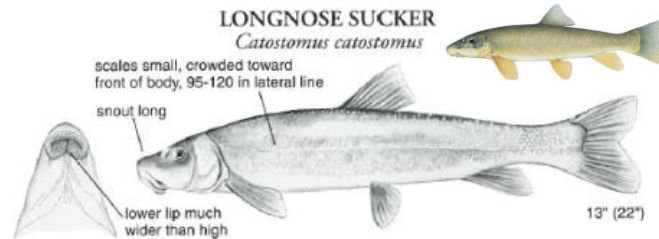
**COLOR:** Dusky olive brown to nearly black above, shading to cream or white below.

**OTHER CHARACTERISTICS:** Dorsal fin has 11 to 13 rays. Scales are medium sized, 60 to 75 in lateral line.

**SIMILAR SPECIES:** (1) Longnose Sucker has a longer snout and smaller scales (its smaller scales make it noticeably smoother to the touch). (2) see Largescale Sucker.



**LONGNOSE SUCKER**  
*Catostomus catostomus*



**OTHER NAME:** Finescale Sucker.

**COLOR:** Back, upper sides, and head to below the eye dark olive to slate; underparts white or yellow. Breeding males are nearly jet black on upper half of head and body and may have red midside band.

**OTHER CHARACTERISTICS:** Has 9 to 12 rays in dorsal fin, and more than 15 scales above lateral line (see illustration for either White Sucker or Largescale Sucker).

