

Bowfins are predators, eating mainly fish, but also taking crayfish, frogs, mollusks and aquatic insects. When compared to other fish, the Bowfin's actions are sluggish, but with its size and feeding habits, it may strike an angler's artificial lure or live bait.

Size, Age and Growth

Adult bowfin females may reach 30 inches (75 cm), obtain a weight of 8½ pounds (3.8 kg) and, live approximately 12 years. Adult males may grow to attain a length of 18-24 in (457 - 610 mm) TL. The longest bowfin caught measured 34.3 in (870 mm) in length, while the largest bowfin fish caught in the United States (South Carolina) weighed 21 lbs. 8 oz. (9.8 kg).

Food Habits

Bowfins normally eat fish, such as speckled perch and catfish in the northern region of Florida, but they may prey on freshwater crayfish.

Reproduction

Mating occurs between April and June in weedy shallow waters. Optimum temperature for nesting and spawning is 61°F-66°F, (16°C-19°C). The males arrive to the site first and construct nests in the form of a circular mat measuring 15-36 inches (39-91 cm) in diameter. As a female approaches a nest, the mating ritual begins with nose bites, nudges, and chasing behavior until the female is receptive. The female will lie on the nest while the male positions himself at her side and eggs are laid. Occasionally more than one couple will use the same nest and a male may try to mate with several females. After 8 to 10 days the eggs hatch. Upon hatching young are 8 mm long and attach themselves to rootlets by an adhesive organ until they are 9 days old and about 0.5 inches (12 mm) long. They then move to the male in a close circle. If one become separated from the parent, it swims in close circles until its parent reappears. Adults have been known to take flight in order to protect their young from predators. They larvae feed on plankton and grow rapidly. When young reach a length of about 4 inches (102 mm), the schools start to break up. Young bowfins grow to over 8 inches (203 mm) in length during their first year of life.