Woundfin

(Plagopterus argentissimus)—Endangered

Description

The woundfin is a small fish approximately 25 inches in length. It has a slender body and rather broad head. The snout overhangs the small, horizontal mouth. Its lips are thin, with barbels present at the corners. The woundfin has no scales. The pelvic fins are joined to the abdomen along the inner edges. The caudal (tail) fin is large, and deeply forked. Woundfinshave a silvery-colored body with the color darkening along the back.

Woundfinare opportunitistic feeders that will feed on both plant and animal material (omnivorous). Their diet includes aquatic insects and algae.

Distribution and Habitat

The wound fin was once found throughout the Virgin and Gila River drainages. In Utahit is currently restricted to a small portion of the Virgin River near La Verkin.

Adult woundfin use areas in the

river that exhibit relatively strong current and shifting sand bottoms. Young wound finst ay in slow, shallow areas closer to shore. Water temperatures in excess of 95° Fare lethal.

Life History

Females produce about 200 eggs, most spawn the second spring after hatching Woundfinspawn in April when water temperatures reach 58 degrees F. During the spawning period, females congregate in pools then move to flowing water where the males are waiting. Spawning areas may be less than 2 feet wide and no more than 1 inch deep. Eggs are deposited randomly and no parental care is provided to them or the young. Most wound fin survive two reproductives easons.

Threats and Reason for Declines

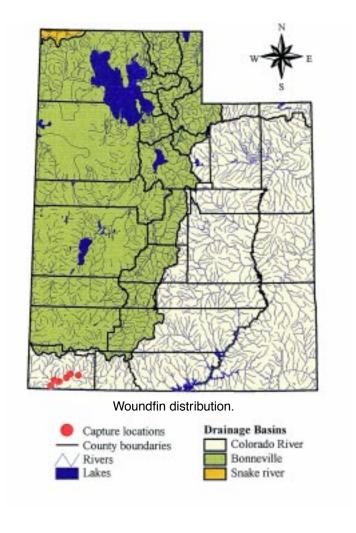
Although wound finare better adapted to environmental extremes, high temperatures that result from reduced flows or lack of streamside vegetation can prove fatal to eggs, young, and the adults Increased competition for food and the introduction of exotic fish species into the Virgin River has resulted in increased predation on wound fin young and brought disease. Reduced water flows and degraded water quality in the river have destroyed wound fin habitat and threat ened the species.

Recovery Efforts

The woundfin was listed as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1973. Currently, there is a population of woundfincurrently being maintained at Dexter National Fish Hatcheries in Dexter, New Mexico. This population will provide the stock for any future reintroductions that are made in areas where habitat conditions have been improved.



 ${\it Photocourtesy} of {\it Utah Division} \ of {\it Wildlife Resources}$



References

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