

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. Woundfins have a silvery-colored body with the color darkening along the back.

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

Distribution and Habitat

The woundfin was once found throughout the Virgin and Gila River drainages. In Utah it is currently restricted to a small portion of the Virgin River near LaVerkin.

Adult woundfin use areas in the

river that exhibit relatively strong current and shifting sand bottoms. Young woundfin stay in slow, shallow areas closer to shore. Water temperatures in excess of 95° F are lethal.

Life History

Females produce about 200 eggs, most spawn the second spring after hatching. Woundfins spawn 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 woundfin survive two reproductive seasons.

Threats and Reason for Declines

Although woundfins are 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 woundfin young and brought disease. Reduced water flows and degraded water quality in the river have destroyed woundfin habitat and threatened 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 woundfin currently 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.



Photo courtesy of Utah Division of Wildlife Resources



Woundfin distribution.



References

LaRivers, I. 1994. Fishes and fisheries of Nevada. University of Nevada Press, Reno, Nevada.

Reger, Paul D. & Deacon, James E. 1988. Copeia. The American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists.

“*Plagopterus argentissimus* Woundfin.” *Biological Resources Research Center*: <<http://www.brrc.unr.edu/data/fish/plagarge.html>> (5 May 1998).