Arkansas Fish Coloring Book

Largemouth Bass
An Arkansas favorite
What is a fish?
A fish is an animal that “breathes” water with gills. Some people call any animal that lives in water a fish, but lots of other animals in rivers and lakes – like frogs, turtles and snakes – aren’t fish.

Arkansas has a great variety of fish. It has more kinds of fish than all except five states, and each one of those states is bigger than Arkansas. We’re lucky to be able to enjoy and catch so many kinds.

How are fish different?
Most fish have fins and scales, but some don’t. Catfish don’t have scales. Instead, they have very smooth skin. They have whisker-like barbels, too, so they can feel things on the bottom of lakes and rivers. Alligator gars have great big scales.

Some fish – like rainbow darters – look like tropical fish you’d see in an aquarium. Others – like Ozark cavefish – have almost no color.

Some are huge. Alligator gars can be more than 8 feet long. Others are tiny. Darters are only 2 or 3 inches long.

Some fish eat insects. Some fish eat other fish. Some even eat plants. Some fish are very common and some are very rare. Bluegills live almost everywhere, but you’ll be lucky if you ever see a southern cavefish.

Fish need our help
Most fish are healthiest when they have clean water with plenty of oxygen. What we do to land and trees near streams and rivers can cause the water to be muddy.

It’s also important to follow rules for fishing. If you catch a fish and don’t plan to keep it, hold it gently, keep it in the water and remove the hook carefully. Don’t take home more fish than the rules allow, and don’t fish where you shouldn’t. If we take care of our fishy friends, they’ll be around for others to enjoy when we’re long gone.

Let’s take a look at some of the fish that live in Arkansas.
Fishy Facts

A big largemouth bass probably is an old-timer. They can live 10 years or more. Blue catfish can live twice that long.

Arkansas has about 215 kinds of fish.

A saugeye is a cross between a walleye and a sauger.

Catfish use taste and smell more than their sight to find food.

Some people use a nickname for bigmouth buffalo – “gourdhead.”

Freshwater drum like to make noise. They have muscles that make booming sounds.

The Ozark cavefish doesn’t have eyes.

Green sunfish can live almost anywhere, from muddy ponds to fast, clear creeks.

Female smallmouth bass lay 2,000 to 10,000 eggs, and males guard the nest until the eggs hatch.

Trout don’t naturally live in Arkansas. They were brought here and put in lakes and rivers.
The shadow bass looks like it’s wearing camouflage.

Black and white crappie like to start building their nests for eggs in spring when the water warms up to about 56 degrees.

Fishermen like to catch bluegills because they fight hard and they’re good to eat.

Darters are only a few inches long, but they are very colorful fish.

Murky water doesn’t bother shovelnose sturgeon. They live in big rivers.

Redear sunfish like warm, clear water with lots of stumps and logs to hide in.

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Longnose gar can weigh as much as 35 pounds and females can live more than 30 years.

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Largemouth bass

A largemouth bass likes to eat minnows, worms, crickets and flashy lures. The largemouth is dark greenish with a light belly and a stripe on its side. It has a larger mouth than a smallmouth bass, and the two fins on its back are almost separated.
Smallmouth bass

The smallmouth bass is a strong fighter that likes cool, clear streams or lakes. It’s not as big as the largemouth bass. It is dark brown, sometimes almost black. Some people call it “brownie,” “bronzeback” or “smallie.”
White crappie

This silvery fish has five or six spines on its back, and dark stripes run up and down its sides. People like to catch crappie, especially in the springtime, because they are very good to eat. They don’t usually fight very hard, though.
Black crappie

It’s easy to get the white crappie and black crappie confused, but it’s easy to tell the difference when they’re next to each other. The black crappie is darker, has black spots and has an extra spine or two on its back. It’s fun to catch, too.
Bluegill

Bluegills live everywhere in Arkansas. These colorful sunfish can be blue, brown and even greenish. A male may have a bright blue head and an orange patch under its small mouth. Most weigh half a pound, but they can reach 3 pounds and more.
Redear sunfish

The redear, known as a “shellcracker,” has an orange spot on its gill cover. The rest of its body is gold and silver with a little green and a yellow belly. It’s a big sunfish, often more than 1 pound. It lives in deeper water than the bluegill.
Green sunfish

These fish are small, half a pound or less, and they like all kinds of lakes and rivers. They have a big mouth for a sunfish, with beautiful greenish coloring and faint, dark stripes. They have a little blue on their cheeks.
Walleye

The walleye has eyes like marbles, sharp teeth, a brown body and a white belly. Its body is long. Greers Ferry Lake is known as one of the best spots to catch walleye, which can reach 20 pounds and more. Most weigh a pound or two.
Brown trout

Brown trout are mostly olive-brown with black spots. They also have beautiful red and orange dots surrounded by blue circles on their sides. Most weigh less than 5 pounds, but they can get as big as 40 pounds in cold Arkansas creeks.
Rainbow trout

Lots of people think this is the prettiest freshwater fish. It has a green back, a pink stripe along its side, a white belly and black speckles all over its body. Rainbows, which aren’t native to Arkansas, live in cold water. Most weigh about a pound.
Blue catfish

These big fish have a hump in their back. Their back is bluish and their sides are silvery. They like to live in places where the water runs and the bottom is rocky. They usually weigh 20 pounds or less but they can grow to more than 100 pounds.
Channel catfish

Channel cats are very common in Arkansas streams. They love to eat things like chicken liver and worms. They have a brown back, brown and gray sides, a white belly and a few black spots. They can weigh as much as 30 pounds.
Bigmouth buffalo

It doesn’t have horns or four legs – it’s a fish with a thick body, greenish-brown sides and a light belly. It likes to live in big water like lakes and slow, wide rivers. They can grow up to about 30 pounds but most weigh 3 to 12 pounds.
Some people call this a “sheepshead.” Its back has a big arch and its sides are silvery. Most of the body has a light red color, too. They’re fun to catch because they like to fight. Most weigh less than 10 pounds but they can reach 50 pounds.
Longnose gar

This long fish with sharp teeth is widespread in Arkansas. It likes quiet pools in streams and calm lakes. Its sides are greenish black and its belly is yellow. The tail and fins are dotted with black spots. They can be more than 3 feet long and weigh 25 pounds.
Spotted gar

The spotted gar looks kind of like a miniature version of the longnose gar with black spots on its body and a shorter snout. They like to live in clear water with lots of plants and trees. Sometimes they get as big as 20 pounds, but most are 1 to 5 pounds.
Shovelnose sturgeon

This primitive brown and gray fish lives in big rivers like the Arkansas, White and Red. Its eggs are sold as caviar. Fishermen with rods and reels don’t usually catch sturgeons. They have barbels under their snouts to help them feel their way on bottom.