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## *Esox lucius*

(northern pike)

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By *Ryan Lefevre*

Kingdom: [Animalia](#)  
 Phylum: [Chordata](#)  
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 Class: [Actinopterygii](#)  
 Order: [Esociformes](#)  
 Family: [Esocidae](#)  
 Genus: [Esox](#)  
 Species: ***Esox lucius***

### Geographic Range

*Esox lucius* are found in all of the world's northern freshwaters: from northern Europe, south to the Pyrenees, east to Siberia; Labrador west to Alaska, South to Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Nebraska.

### Habitat

*Esox lucius* are found in almost every type of freshwater, from cold deep lakes, to warm shallow ponds, to muddy rivers. Having a broad range of tolerances for water temperature, clarity, and oxygen content allows *E. lucius* to be "one of the most adaptable freshwater species" (Steinberg, 1992. pg. 20)

**Aquatic Biomes:** lakes and ponds; rivers and streams.

### Physical Description

Mass

0.50 to 1.40 kg  
(1.1 to 3.08 lbs)

Northern pike average 18-20 inches in length. They can be identified by their single dorsal fin and light colored spots along their dark body. They are also recognized by scales that cover their entire cheek and the upper half of their gill covers. Their close relative, the muskellunge (*Esox masquinongy*), have scales covering only the upper half of their cheek and gill covers. The sides of *E. lucius* vary from dark shades of green to olive green to brown, with seven to nine rows of yellowish, bean shaped spots. The underside is white to cream colored.

**Some key physical features:** bilateral symmetry 

## Reproduction

Northern pike are considered random spawners, not nest builders. Spawning occurs in the shallows when the water temperature reaches 40-45 degrees(F). Spawning lasts for 5-10 days, after which the female leaves. Males remain in the spawning area for several weeks, but do not protect the eggs. At this stage the eggs are vulnerable to predators. The eggs that do survive hatch in about two weeks. With their insatiable eating habits, young *E. lucius* grow rapidly in both length and weight. Males become sexually mature at age 2-3 years, and females at 3-4 years.

## Behavior

*Esox lucius* are aggressive, solitary fish. They are typically lurkers, but are able to attack quickly. Their eyes are highly movable and are able to see in practically any direction. This is extremely important in tracking their prey. Considered "sprint predators", *E. lucius* hide in some type of cover, cocked in an "S" position, ready to strike.

**Key behaviors:** natatorial ; motile 

## Food Habits

*Esox lucius* are carnivorous fish. Equipped with sharp teeth and very complex skull and jaw structures, they are predators of smaller fish, frogs, crayfish, small mammals, and birds.

## Economic Importance for Humans: Negative

The Northern pike has not been used as a commercial fish in North America, but rather it is looked upon as a game fish.

## Economic Importance for Humans: Positive

*Esox lucius* is a prized game fish and is used as a commercial food fish in Eastern Europe.

## Conservation Status

The Northern pike is not currently threatened by extinction. The Departments of Natural Resources in states where it occur keeps a close watch on its survival and can alter population levels by stocking streams with Northern pike that have been raised in hatcheries.

## Contributors

Ryan Lefevre (author), University of Michigan: June, 1999.

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