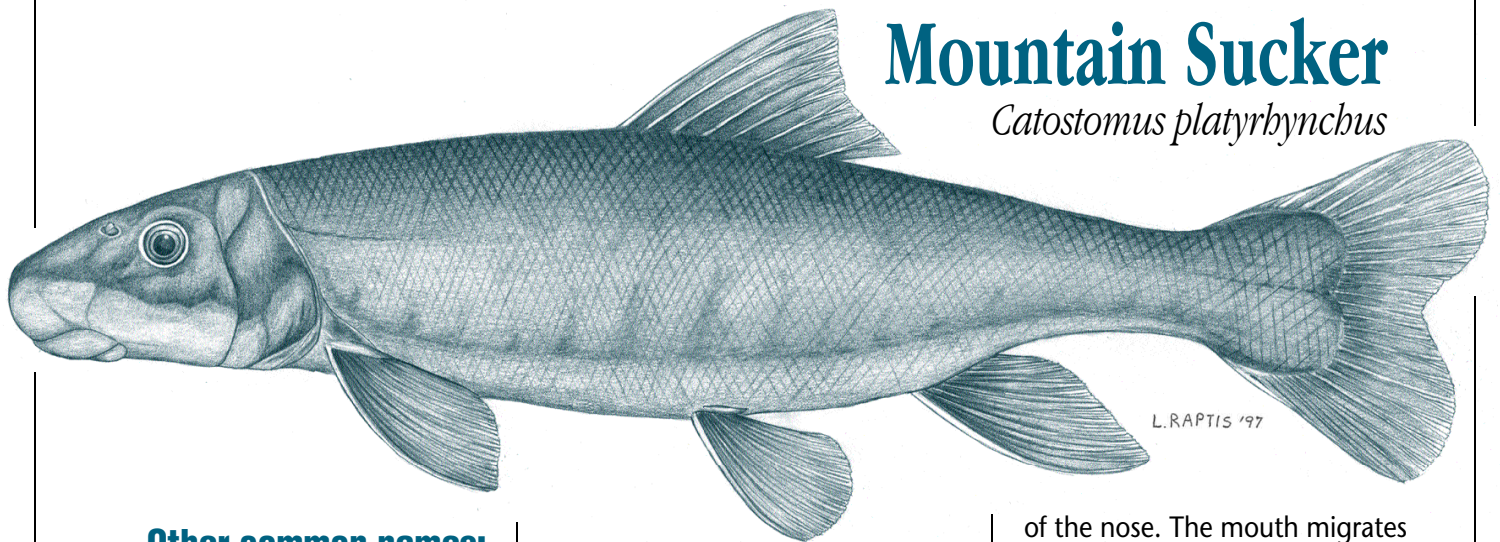


B.C. Fish facts



Mountain Sucker

Catostomus platyrhynchus

Other common names:

Northern mountain sucker,
plains mountain sucker

Typical range in length for
adults: 13 - 17 cm

Maximum length: 23 cm

Typical range in weight for
adults: 19 - 47 g

Maximum weight: 126 g

What do they look like?

Mountain suckers are small, torpedo-shaped fish. Like other suckers, they have large mouths with large fleshy lips, which they can extend to feed, but no teeth. The lower jaw is edged with cartilage. The lower lip is shaped like the tail flukes of a whale and covered with papillae (sensory organs for feeding). Mountain suckers have a deep notch where the upper and lower lips join; in other suckers the two lips come together like one. The back of their body is dark green, grey or brown, speckled with black. The sensory line down their sides (lateral line) is not very obvious. The belly of the fish is pale yellow to white. Fins are normally colourless. Breeding fish are brightly coloured with an orange to deep red band on their flanks and darker fins. Very young suckers closely resemble minnows with the mouth placed at the end

of the nose. The mouth migrates under the head as they grow. Mountain sucker fry are strongly marked with dark green backs, white bellies, and three dark crescent-shaped markings behind the gill cover.

Where do they live?

Mountain suckers live in cool rivers and streams with moderate currents and rocky substrates. They rarely occur in larger rivers and lakes. These fish are found in the mountainous regions of North America from central Alberta in the north, the Pacific coast in Washington and Oregon on the west, Nevada and Utah on the south and as far east as South Dakota. The Mountain Sucker has an unusual distribution in B.C. including some larger rivers. It is found in the Fraser River near Herrling Island and further downstream near the Harrison River confluence; in the Tulameen River, Wolfe Creek and the mainstem Similkameen River; and

in the North Thompson River near Heffley Creek.

What do they eat?

Their most popular food items are diatoms (single celled algae with hard shells) and other types of algae. The chisel-like shape of their lower jaw may help them scrape algae off rocks and other substrate material. They also eat insect larvae and pupae. Very young chiselmouth feed on plankton; older juveniles eat mainly surface insects.

What is their life cycle like?

Mountain suckers scatter their eggs in riffles near pools in fast flowing streams. They spawn in late spring or early summer when water temperatures go above 10.5° C. An adhesive coating on the eggs make them stick where they land. Eggs are yellowish in colour and they get larger as the female grows in length. The eggs hatch about 8 to 14 days after spawning. After hatching the young remain in shallow water, moving to deeper water with a stronger current as they grow

larger. They appear to require some kind of cover (deep water, aquatic vegetation, or bank cover) probably as protection from predators. Males mature from age of 2 to 4; females reach maturity between 3 to 5 years. Males live to about 7 years of age and females around 9 years.

How are they doing?

Mountain suckers are neither abundant nor well distributed in B.C. They have been placed on the provincial Blue List as their limited distribution makes them vulnerable to disturbance. The State of Washington has listed the mountain sucker as a species of special concern. They are sensitive to habitat degradation from both agricultural and industrial development and to the introduction of exotic species (species not native to their ecosystem) into their environment. The federal listing organization, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), evaluated this species across Canada in 1991 and did not list it at that time.

How you can help:

- Never transport live fish or other organisms from one body of water to another. This could transfer diseases and parasites from one ecosystem to another, or upset the natural balance in the ecosystem where they are released.

- Be aware that what you dump down the sink or into your septic tank, roadside storm drains or sewers may find its way into streams. Help keep water quality high by using detergents and soaps minimally and by not dumping harsh chemicals, such as bleach, paint thinners or antifreeze, into drains.
- Form a group of water stewards and volunteers to monitor local water quality.
- If you own property along a stream, maintain natural conditions both in the stream and on the banks of the stream.

No kidding!

- The mountain sucker was not discovered in B.C. until the mid 1950's.
- They seem to prefer faster water and higher elevations than other suckers.
- The eggs of the mountain sucker are sticky so that they will not drift too far downstream after spawning.
- This fish is more common in the U.S. where it has been used as bait for other fish and as food for farmed furbearers.
- The range of this species may still be expanding due to long-term geological processes.

