

# Some of Florida's Freshwater Exotic Fishes



African Jewelfish



Black Acara



Blackbelt Cichlid



Blue Tilapia\*



Brown Hoplo



Bullseye Snakehead\*



Clown Knifefish



Butterfly Peacock



Grass Carp\*



Jaguar Guapote



Mayan Cichlid



Midas Cichlid



Oscar



Redbellied Pacu



Pike Killifish



Sailfin Catfish



Spotted Tilapia\*



Walking Catfish\*

\* indicates regulated species that cannot be possessed live without a special permit

## Some of Florida's Freshwater Exotic Fishes

Thirty-four (34) freshwater **exotic fishes** (= fishes from other countries) are known to be reproducing in Florida waters. Collectively, these fishes represent one of the most diverse, abundant, and well-studied exotic fish faunas in the world. The introduction of exotic fishes changes aquatic ecosystem dynamics, and some of these changes can have serious socioeconomic or ecological ramifications. All but one of these were introduced illegally as the result of individuals releasing unwanted fish or flooding of culture ponds, even though releasing exotic species in Florida is punishable by a \$1,000 fine and up to one-year in jail. Not only is releasing non-native species illegal, it is also inhumane since most will die shortly after being released, and those that live and thrive may cause problems for native species. Anyone wanting to dispose of exotic fish should give them to a friend or aquarium store, or euthanize them by lowering water temperature with ice. All of the exotic fishes illustrated occur in southeast Florida, but a few are found throughout the State.

**FAST FACTS:** ■ **African Jewelfish** (*Hemichromis bimaculatus*)—small fish native to Africa and introduced in early 1960s; maximum size five inches; associated with dense vegetation. ■ **Black Acara** (*Cichlasoma bimaculatum*)—native to South America and first reported in early 1960s, this species sometimes becomes abundant in densely vegetated habitats or ponds containing few other fishes. ■ **Blackbelt Cichlid** (*Paraneetroplus hybrid*)—First reported in 2001, parents native to Mexico, three widespread populations; incidentally caught by anglers. ■ **Blue Tilapia** (*Oreochromis aureus*)—native to Africa and Middle East, first brought to Florida in 1961 by FWC for research purposes, but release into open waters never authorized; grows to 10 lbs and feeds primarily on plankton and detritus; male digs and guards large crater-like nest in shallow water; female broods eggs and young in mouth. ■ **Brown Hoplo** (*Hoplosternum littorale*)—first reported in 1995 and now widespread in central Florida and spreading south; maximum size about 10 inches, native to South America. ■ **Bullseye Snakehead** (*Channa marulioides*)—first reported in 2000; can breathe air; resembles a bowfin but has longer dorsal and anal fins; edible; native range Pakistan, Malaysia, and southern China; primarily eat small fish and crustaceans. ■ **Butterfly Peacock** (*Cichla ocellaris*)—only established exotic fish introduced by FWC; stocked in 1984 to help control undesirable exotic fishes and to increase fishing opportunities in metropolitan southeast Florida canals; now supports a multi-million dollar sportfishery without deleterious effects; cannot live in water below 60°F, spawns in shallow water, and both parents guard young; maximum size 12-15 lbs; native to tropical South America. ■ **Clown Knifefish** (*Chitala ornata*)—large (to 35 inches and 15 lbs) unusually shaped fish native to tropical Asia; first reported in 1994, not widespread or abundant. ■ **Grass Carp** (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*)—not reproducing, but many sterile fish have been approved for release to control nuisance aquatic plants; largest in Florida 75 lbs; native to Siberia and China. ■ **Hornet Tilapia** (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*)—native to Africa, first collected in 2005, not widespread or abundant, incidentally caught by anglers. ■ **Jaguar Guapote** (*Parachromis managuensis*)—native to Central America and introduced in late 1980s; has small teeth; incidentally caught by anglers. ■ **Mayan Cichlid** (*Cichlasoma urophthalmus*)—first reported from remote areas of Everglades National Park in early 1980s; native to Central America; tolerant of brackish water; widespread, abundant, and is a popular sportfish. ■ **Midas Cichlid** (*Amphilophus citrinellus*)—first collected in Florida in late 1970s; native to Great Lakes of Nicaragua; adults brightly colored, but young drab gray. ■ **Oscar** (*Astronotus ocellatus*)—one of first exotic fishes reported in late 1950s, native to South America, and widespread south of Lake Okeechobee; grows to about 2.5 lbs, and is a popular sportfish. ■ **Black Pacu** (*Colossoma macropomum*) and **Redbellied Pacu** (*Piaractus brachypomus*)—native to South America and popular aquarium fish; grow to a large size and are frequently illegally released. Numerous reports of angler caught fish every year but no evidence of reproduction. ■ **Pike Killifish** (*Belonesox belizanus*)—small fish (less than 7 inches) native to Central America; reportedly released in 1957 after completion of a university research project; preys on small fishes and births young alive; prefers marshy habitats. ■ **Sailfin Catfish** (*Pterygoplichthys multiradiatus*)—one of three similar suckermouth catfishes in Florida, this species first collected in late 1970s, but another species had been present since 1950s; native to South America and covered with bony scales; grows to greater than 20 inches; burrowing activity sometimes leads to erosion problems. ■ **Spotted Tilapia** (*Tilapia mariae*)—native to west Africa and first reported in 1974; this is only substrate spawning tilapia in Florida; abundant in south Florida where it is the primary forage for butterfly peacock; coloration changes from a barred pattern in juveniles to spotted pattern in adults. ■ **Walking Catfish** (*Clarias batrachus*)—native to Southeast Asia and first reported in mid-1960s; numerous media reports anticipated catastrophic effects that never materialized; grows to more than 20 inches, can breathe air, and traverse short distances on land when raining.

More information about Florida's exotic fishes is available on the web at:  
[MyFWC.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/Nonnatives/freshwater-fish](http://MyFWC.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/Nonnatives/freshwater-fish)

Produced by: Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, Non-Native  
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April 2014

