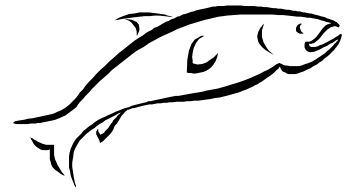




Fishy facts ...



What is a fish?

A fish is an animal which lives and breathes in water. All fish are vertebrates (have a backbone) and most breathe through gills and have fins and scales. Fish make up about half of all known vertebrate species.

What is a person who studies fish called?

An ichthyologist.

How are fish identified?

A combination of the number of fins and their characteristics, scale counts, general features, colour, maximum length and distribution are used.

What is the difference between male and female fish?

In some species the males and females have different shaped bodies or different colouring; in other species there is no visible difference.

How do fish breathe?

Some fish have lungs and breathe air, but most breathe through gills. Gills are made up of thin sheets of tissue richly supplied with blood vessels. As water passes over them dissolved oxygen is absorbed into the blood and waste products such as carbon dioxide pass out into the water. The gills are protected by a large bony plate called an operculum.

Why are fish slimy?

Fish secrete a type of mucus from their skin. This slime coating is important because it provides protection against parasites and diseases, covers wounds to prevent infection and helps fish move through the water faster. Some species release toxins in their slime which ward off attacking creatures while others use their slime to feed their young.

How do you age fish?

Scientists age fish using otoliths, a small, white structure found in the heads of all fish except sharks, rays and lampreys. Some fish species have more than one set of otoliths in their heads. Not only do otoliths provide fish with a sense of balance and help in hearing, but growth rings called annuli are formed on the otolith everyday. Some fish also have a thicker ring on their otolith which appears once a year. These growth rings are like those found in a tree trunk. By removing the otoliths, cleaning them and looking at them under a microscope the exact age of a fish can be determined.



Fishy facts ...

What is a lateral line?

The lateral line is a row of scales that most fish have along their sides, stretching from their head to tail. Under these scales are a system of fluid-filled canals and specialised cells which transmit vibrations to the brain. The lateral line helps fish to detect objects including predators and prey.

What do fish eat?

Detritus, diatoms, algae, zooplankton, fish and their eggs, terrestrial insects, aquatic macro-invertebrates (particularly insect larvae, crustaceans and worms), molluscs, aquatic plants, water birds, turtles, frogs, snakes and mice.

What eats fish?

Other fish, birds (e.g. pelicans, cormorants and herons), snakes, turtles, crustaceans, some insect larvae (e.g. dragonfly larvae), and humans. In other parts of the world there are also animals such as wild cats, wild pigs and bears that feed on fish.

Where do freshwater fish live?

Freshwater fish inhabit all sorts of environments: streams, rivers, lakes, springs, lands, lagoons, billabongs, backwaters, estuaries, swamps, dune lakes, reservoirs, ponds and drains. Some freshwater fish also spend part of their life cycle at sea.

How many types of freshwater fish are there in Australia?

There are about 180 species of freshwater fish in Australia. There are also about 25 non-native freshwater species.

What is the biggest and smallest freshwater fish in Australia?

Australia's biggest wholly freshwater fish is the Murray Cod. It has been measured at 1.8 m long, weighing 113.5 kg. Most Murray cod now caught are under 10 kg.

The smallest species is the Eastern Little galaxias, the male of which only grows to 3.4 cm long.

Amongst the non-native species Quinnat Salmon which have spent part of their life at sea can tip the scales at 57 kg and 1.5 m in length. The smallest non-native fish is the Eastern Gambusia, the male only grows to 3 cm.