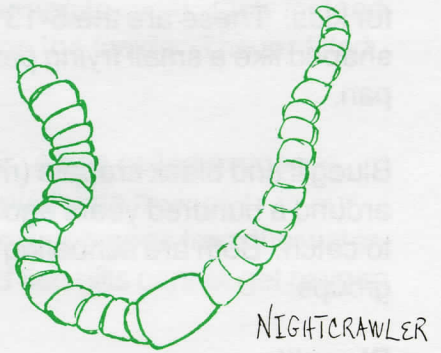


Summer 2003

# NATURE DETECTIVES

## Go Fish

*I'm a-goin' fishin'.  
She's a-goin' fishin'.  
You can go a-fishin' too.*



If you've never been fishing, you are missing out on a great way to enjoy being outdoors. Fishing is fun and challenging. Fish can be tasty and nutritious food you catch yourself as you develop your fishing skills.

Even if you don't catch any fish, you will have a special opportunity to be a nature detective when you go fishing. There are more plants, animals, and insects in and around water than in any other habitat. So grab your gear and go.

## Fishing Gear

simple fishing pole  
fishing line  
bait or lure  
hooks (barbless or with the barbs bent flat)  
fishing buddy (a grown-up person)

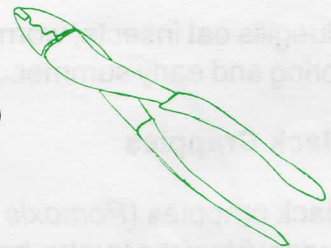
Hook



BARBLESS  
Hook



bobber (optional)  
sinker (optional)  
pliers



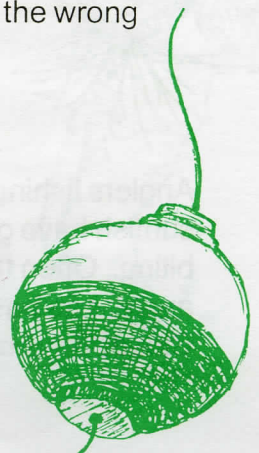
A buddy who can share his or her fishing knowledge is a treasure when you go fishing. There is no better time for quiet chatting than when you have a fishing pole in your hand.

The fishing pole doesn't have to be fancy to catch fish. Long ago, people caught plenty of fish with line made out of plant fibers and hooks made out of bone.

Use barbless hooks or ask your fishing buddy to bend the barbs flat against the hook with a pair of pliers. Barbless hooks make it easier to unhook your fish when you catch it. The hooks also come out of your jeans or your finger easier if you accidentally set the hook in the wrong place!

Little worms make good bait, but be sure to check to see if bait is allowed. Many places have rules against using bait. In those places you need to use fake bait called a lure. Good lures include spinners, which look like an insect or small fish when you pull them through the water, and jigs, which look like an injured bug when you pull your line with a short, jerky motion.

A sinker is a weight to hold your line down in the water. A bobber is a little float to keep your hook from sinking all the way to the bottom of the pond.



BOBBER

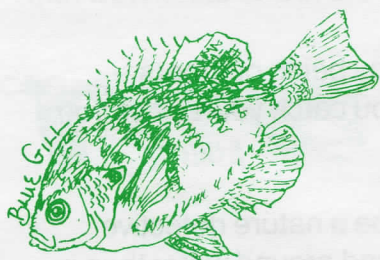


## Good Fish for Fishing

Even though there are thousands of kinds of fish in the world, certain kinds offer great fishing for kids. These are the 5-13 inch "pan fish." Pan fish get their name because their bodies are shaped like a small frying pan and because they taste good when they are cooked in such a pan.

Bluegill and black crappie (rhymes with sloppy) are two kinds of pan fish brought to Colorado around a hundred years ago. They are also called sunfish. They are fun to fish and fairly easy to catch. Both are schooling fish, which means they like to hang around with each other in groups.

### Bluegills



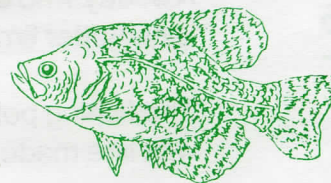
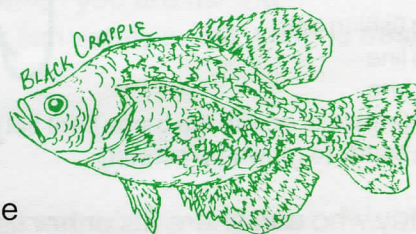
Bluegills (*Lepomis macrochirus*) spend a lot of time at the edge of weed beds. They are usually found in shallower water in the early morning or evening. They go to cooler, deeper water during the warm mid-day. You can often see the male guarding a round area he has cleared in the sand or gravel for the female to lay her eggs.

Bluegills are named for the blue color around their gills. Their sides are light olive green with darker up-and-down stripes.

Bluegills eat insects, worms, shrimp, tadpoles, and little minnows. They are easiest to catch in spring and early summer.

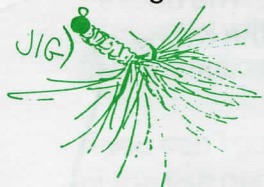
### Black Crappies

Black crappies (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*) hide near docks, underwater tree trunks, brush piles, and boulders. They eat lots of bugs in the summer, but their favorite food seems to be smaller fish such as minnows. They are easiest to catch in the spring.



## Fishing Tricks

Black crappie and bluegills are easily fished using a simple pole, line, and hook. This kind of fishing is called angling and the person fishing is an angler.



Crappies and bluegills have small mouths so use small bait or lures. Little worms make good small bait. Where bait is not allowed, use a little spinner or a little jig.

Anglers fishing in shallow water can enjoy watching sunfish eyeing the bait. Like most fish, sunfish have good eyesight. They usually approach the hook timidly and look it over before biting. Often they will try to take a little nibble first. Splashing or jerking the line frightens them away. The best way to catch them is by fishing very slowly. Be as quiet and still as you can. Cloudy days can be good fishing days because the fish cannot see your shadow on the water.



## A Few Words about Fish Bodies

Fish swim easily because they have a swim bladder inside their bodies. A swim bladder works somewhat like water wings many kids use when they are learning to swim. Only instead of having a bag of air on the outside, the fish has its swim bladder on the inside. The air-filled space helps the fish float at whatever depth it wants to swim.

Fish don't breathe air like we do. You could say they breathe water. A gas called oxygen is part of the air we suck into our lungs, and it is part of the water fish push into their gills. In our lungs, the oxygen goes from the air into our blood. In fish gills, the oxygen goes from the water into the fish's blood. Our lungs cannot get oxygen out of water, and fish gills cannot get oxygen out of air.

Sunfish and many other fish have scales. Scales look a bit like fingernails laid in layers over the fish's body. Fish scales grow the fish's whole life. They grow in rings like tree trunks. By counting the rings on a fish scale you can tell the age of the fish just like tree rings tell how many years the tree has lived. Fish scales look fragile but they provide tough protection for fish bodies.

Slime is another protective covering on fish bodies. The outermost surface of the fish is slimy. This slime protects the fish from infection, especially fungus infections. The slime also acts a little like grease, helping the fish slide easier through the water.

## Rules for Fishing

There are rules about fishing. The rules are often posted on signs near fishing waters. Any store that sells fishing gear will have free pamphlets of Colorado fishing rules. No one under the age of 15 needs a fishing license, but kids still need to obey the rules.

Rules help protect the water where fish live. Keeping the water habitat clean and healthy will ensure a good home for future fish as well as other animals and plants.

Always pick up all fishing line and hooks. Carelessly left fishing gear can be harmful to many animals. Animals easily become tangled or hooked and cannot get free.





## Catch and Eat

If you are going to eat your fish, it is kind and practical to kill the fish quickly. Your fishing buddy can quickly kill the fish by cutting through the backbone behind the head with a sharp knife. For best flavor, clean the fish as soon as possible. Cleaning the fish means removing the fish's guts or internal organs and scraping off the scales. Wrap the fish in plastic and put it on ice to keep it cold until you cook it.

## Catch and Release

If you don't want to eat the fish, pull it in and take it off the hook as soon as possible. Handle it with wet hands and in the water if you can. This helps the fish keep its slime coating.



Remove the hook gently and don't squeeze the fish or put your fingers in its gills. If the fish swallowed the hook deep into its mouth or throat, cut the line close to the fish's mouth. The hook will slowly rust away or eventually fall out. Hold the fish in calm water until it regains its balance. Move it slowly back and forth to push water into the gills. Then let the fish swim away.



In some fishing waters, all fish must be released after catching. Artificial lures are usually not swallowed as far as fish swallow bait, so they are good to use when you are fishing catch-and-release. Returning fish safely to the water is easier with barbless hooks.

## Where to Fish

There is a fishing pond just for kids at the Boulder County Fairgrounds in Longmont. It is called Cattail Pond. The Colorado Department of Wildlife (DOW) publishes Fishing Close to Home with detailed information and maps to guide you to fishing on the Front Range.

## More Information

To see what crappies and bluegills and other fish look like, go to the DOW web site: [www.wildlife.state.co.us/fishing/fish\\_identification/index.asp](http://www.wildlife.state.co.us/fishing/fish_identification/index.asp).

If you can't go fishing, you might try some of the fish games on the DOW web site: [www.wildlife.state.co.us](http://www.wildlife.state.co.us). Click on "Kids Page." From "Discovery Pages" go to "Get Puzzled" to "Fishing is Funtastic."

The DOW also has Take-A-Family-Fishing Days on June 7 and 8<sup>th</sup>. Gear and lessons are provided free for your whole family.

