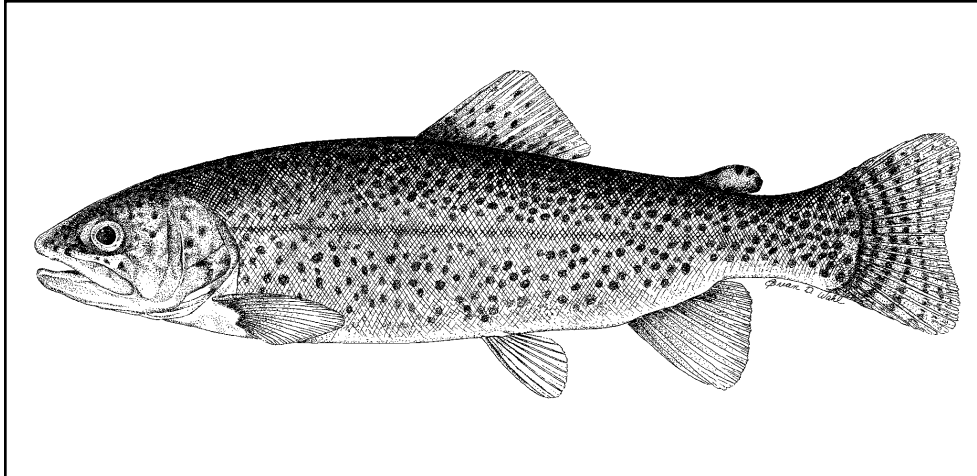


Life History Notes

Rainbow Trout

Common Names: Steelhead, Kamloops

Scientific Name: *Oncorhynchus mykiss*



Publication 180
(R999)

Identification

Rainbow trout have the typical trout-shape with an adipose fin, and a squarish tail that has black spots throughout. The rainbow trout has 10-12 anal rays and a white mouth and gums (coho and Chinook salmon, occasionally found in Lake Erie, have gray or black gums, more anal rays, and forked tails). Lake Erie steelhead are generally bright silver with a bright pink band. Males develop a hooked jaw known as a "kype" during the spawning season.

Range and Habitat

Rainbow trout are native to the western coastal United States and Alaska, but this species has been introduced into cold water locations throughout North America. Rainbow trout prefer cold water streams with cobble, boulders, deep pools, and overhead cover.

Life History

Rainbow trout are a cold water species that in nature spawn in moving water over gravel or cobble substrate. In Ohio, there is little or no natural reproduction, so the Ohio Division of Wildlife raises and stocks rainbow (steelhead) trout in Lake Erie tributaries. The young trout live in these streams for one or two years before migrating out to Lake Erie. They remain in the lake for several years before they return to the tributaries to run upstream and attempt to spawn.

Adult Size

Rainbow trout average 20 to 23 inches in length. The state record rainbow weighed 20.97 pounds and measured 36.5 inches in length.

Fishing Methods

Anglers catch steelhead trout in Lake Erie during the summer while trolling for walleye. Steelhead are caught mainly on minnow-shaped crankbaits and spoons fished off downriggers or divers. In September, shore anglers catch steelhead off piers with spoons or jigs tipped with maggots. Once fish move into the rivers in the fall, anglers will catch steelhead with spawn bags, salmon eggs, flies, jigs tipped with maggots, minnows or worms. The best locations are pools or deep water (>2 feet) with some line of current flowing through it. During the spring, steelhead prefer flies, spinners, small minnow-shaped crankbaits, and jigs with maggots.