

Wild Ohio

M A G A Z I N E

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REEL LEGENDS

PERCH TAGGING | OUTDOOR PLAY AREAS | COMEBACK BIRDS

Wild Ohio



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Cover photo by LITTLE MOON / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

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WILD TURKEY
BRUCE MACQUEEN

Reel Legends

WHAT MAKES AN OHIO RECORD FISH?



It takes time for a state-record worthy fish to grow. Lots of time. And habitat. And limited fishing pressure. And good genetics.

You get the idea; state-record fish aren't reeled in with every cast. Record-worthy fish have a mysterious quality because they are so few and far between. However, Ohio's list of big fish shows many recent entries. The Outdoor Writers of Ohio, which maintains the state's history of biggest fish, has confirmed 12 new records in the past 10 years. Wild Ohio Magazine asked some of the best in the business – ODNR Division of Wildlife fisheries professionals – to find out what it takes to grow an Ohio record fish. We picked four species. Here's what we discovered.

WALLEYE

by Travis Hartman
Fisheries Biologist

OHIO RECORD: Weighed 16.19 pounds; measured 33 inches. Caught by Tom Haberman, from New Brunswick, at Lake Erie in 1999.

The current record was caught when two huge year classes (1982 and 1986) were in trophy-size age range. The huge 2003 class is now in trophy-size range. There is a distinct chance of the walleye record being broken in the next five years.

TIME: Anywhere from 12 to 19 years. The highest growth rates would be during the summer season, but body maintenance and growth takes place throughout the year. Walleye feed throughout the year, as proven by recent excellent ice fishing.

DIET: Walleye feed on gizzard shad, emerald shiners, rainbow smelt, and yellow perch. Large hatches of these smaller fish give walleye a plentiful food source to grow larger.

SPACE: Walleye migrations occur throughout the Great Lakes system and are not limited to Lake Erie. The walleye is a visual predator that does well in clear to stained water. Adult fish migrate to cooler water in the central basin during the summer.

FISHING PRESSURE: Fishing pressure ranges from high to nonexistent, depending on the time of year, location, and weather. Walleye generally receive higher pressure from anglers in the western basin and less as they migrate east.

HABITAT: Shallow rocks and reefs or rivers are required for spawning. Large open-water expanses are used for summer migrations and feeding. Areas around the Lake Erie Bass Islands provide traditional walleye habitat for fish that do not migrate.



TOM HABERMAN WITH HIS RECORD WALLEYE IN 1999.

STEELHEAD

by Kevin Kayle
Fisheries Biology Supervisor

OHIO RECORD: Weighed 21.3 pounds; measured 38 inches. Caught by Jason Brooks, from Tallmadge, at Lake Erie in 2010.

Young steelhead live in cold water 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.

TIME: Four to five summers, or more, in Lake Erie. Steelhead grow year-round, but mainly in the spring through fall. Steelhead must avoid sea lamprey and avian predation when first migrating as yearlings.

DIET: Main prey items often include emerald shiners, gizzard shad, rainbow smelt, and alewife, but steelhead will eat whatever bait fish or forage (insects, fish eggs, and more) is available in abundance.

SPACE: In the late spring, summer, and early fall steelhead thrive in the open waters of the central and eastern basins of Lake Erie. The location switches to rivers and streams during spawning migrations. Steelhead need high-quality water with excellent clarity.

FISHING PRESSURE: Less fishing pressure is better for larger steelhead. The high degree of catch and release practiced by Ohio anglers in streams benefits larger fish.

HABITAT: Cool to cold water, mainly in Lake Erie's central and eastern basins in late spring, summer, and early fall. Steelhead are found nearshore and in tributaries from the fall through the early spring.

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JASON BROOKS WITH HIS RECORD STEELHEAD IN 2010.



THINK YOU'VE CAUGHT A STATE-RECORD FISH? Find the complete list and a record submission form at outdoorwritersofohio.org. All state records are based on weight only.

FLATHEAD CATFISH

by Matt Wolfe
Fisheries Biologist

OHIO RECORD: Weighed 76.5 pounds; measured 58 5/8 inches. Caught by Richard Affolter, from New Philadelphia, at Clendening Lake (Harrison County) in 1979.

Lots of anglers catch large flathead catfish incidentally, but you must think big if you target these fish. Flathead catfish have large appetites and a nasty demeanor if they are hooked. Think big, think heavy, and hold on!

TIME: Larger catfish could easily be 30 years old or more. Fish larger than 50 pounds are regularly caught in netting surveys, so they could have hatched in the 1980s. Larger flatheads put more effort into reproduction, so the true growing season probably doesn't begin until spawning is finished.

DIET: Large gizzard shad are the likely key diet item because they are so numerous. Larger sucker species (white sucker, redhorse) provide a source of food for trophy flatheads.

SPACE: In the early spring flathead catfish move up to shallow water for a pre-spawn feed. They are found along riprap or areas with downed trees during bass surveys in the spring. In summer they go a bit deeper offshore to follow the food. Flatheads are not scavengers and always look for live food.

FISHING PRESSURE: There seems to be more fishing pressure on the rivers as compared to lakes. Many of the biggest catches are from those targeting other gamefish. Anglers who target them during the summer can find lots of action. To catch a state record, find flatheads from early spring through the pre-spawn to ensure they have their maximum weight for the year.

HABITAT: Undercut banks, woody debris, and larger riprap are favorites for flatheads during pre-spawn and spawning times. Find large flats offshore after the spawn as they follow their food.

BLUEGILL

by Don Swatzel
Fisheries Biologist

OHIO RECORD: Weighed 3.28 pounds; measured 12 3/4 inches. Caught by Willis D. Nicholes, from Quaker City, at Salt Fork Reservoir (Guernsey County) in 1990.

Most trophy sunfish are caught in small ponds (both public and private). The best way to target large fish is to look for spawning beds in the spring.

TIME: A bluegill in public waters needs four to six years to reach 8 inches, nose to tail. Bluegills are usually larger in private ponds because of better growth rates and less fishing pressure. In private waters it takes a bluegill three to five years to reach 8 inches. A bluegill 12 inches long is likely to be at least 10 years old.

DIET: Bluegills have a diverse diet. They school in groups of 10 to 20 fish and are usually found with other species of sunfish (reder sunfish, warmouth, green sunfish, pumpkinseed, and longear sunfish). This makes competition for available food high.

SPACE: Bluegills find shallow inshore areas with some aquatic vegetation during the spring spawn. Adults usually move to deeper water during the summer; however, they have been known to follow a daily migratory pattern that brings them to shore at night. Bluegills typically have a small home range and will remain in that area most of their lives.

FISHING PRESSURE: High harvest rates from anglers and bass are necessary to control populations. Bluegills have high spawning rates and can easily overpopulate a pond or lake. However, overharvest of larger and older fish in the population can result in a decline in quality.

HABITAT: Bluegills prefer warm water, some rooted aquatic vegetation, and woody debris. They avoid direct sunlight, preferring shade from underwater cover or deeper water. Dense aquatic vegetation protects small fish, which increases the chance of stunting.



CHRIS ROLPH: OHIO RECORD BLUE CATFISH



PATRICK JOHNSON: OHIO RECORD COMMON CARP



BRENT MCGLONE: OHIO RECORD BIGMOUTH BUFFALO



ROBERT CAMPBELL: OHIO RECORD BROWN TROUT



DOUGLAS KOENIG: OHIO RECORD WARMOUTH



ZACHARY JARED: OHIO RECORD LONGNOSE GAR

OHIO STATE RECORD BIG FISH FACTS

Longest-standing record:
Rock bass (1932)

Most recent record:
Buffalo sucker, bowfishing (2013)

Largest record fish, by weight:
Blue catfish, 96 pounds (2009)

Smallest record fish, by weight:
Longear sunfish, 0.41 pounds (2012)

Longest record fish, mouth to tail:
Flathead catfish, 58 5/8 inches (1979)

Shortest record fish, mouth to tail:
Longear sunfish, 8 inches (2012)

35

Ohio big fish records caught at public waters, out of 47. Private ponds and gravel pits account for the other 12.

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Records caught at Lake Erie, the most for a single body of water in Ohio. Lake Erie tributaries account for five more records.

