

Cutthroat Trout



Scientific Name: *Onchorhynchus clarki*

Onchorhynchus means “hooked nose” (This refers to the hook or “kype” which develops on the lower jaw of breeding males); *clarkii* is in honor of William Clark of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Cutthroat trout were the first trout encountered by the expedition.

Cutthroat trout are part of the Salmon family and are related to rainbow trout. In fact, they are so closely related that they can interbreed with rainbow trout and produce a fertile hybrid called a “cut-bow”.

Other Names: Cuttie, native trout, red trout, black spotted stout

Range:

Cutthroat trout are not native to Maryland. Their native range is the Pacific Northwest and the Rocky Mountains. Because the individual populations tended to be isolated, the species now consists of 14 separate subspecies. A few of the coastal populations are anadromous.



In Maryland, cutthroat trout were introduced in the North Branch of the Potomac River where they are found today.

Appearance:

Cutthroat trout are usually gray or greenish on the back fading to light silver on the belly. They tend to be more heavily spotted towards the rear of the fish and on the caudal fin. The defining characteristic is the red, pink or orange mark on the underside of the lower jaw or below the gills which gives the fish its common name.



Fresh water cutthroats tend to be smaller than anadromous fish and on average weigh about 2 to 5 pounds and are 9 to 11 inches long. The largest cutthroat on record was caught in Nevada in 1925 and weighed 41 pounds; unfortunately, this particular race of fish was determined to be extinct in 1945. The Maryland record weighed 7 pounds 9 ounces and was 29 inches long; it was caught in the North Branch of the Potomac in 2000.

Habitat:

The preferred habitat for cutthroat trout is basically similar to that of other trout. In Maryland, they are found in the North Branch of the Potomac.

Diet:

Their diet is similar to that of other trout. As they increase in size, they tend to prey more frequently on smaller fish.

Reproduction:

Most male cutthroat trout mature when they are 2 to 3 years old; females mature a year later. In their native range, they spawn in the spring. They generally live 7 to 10 years.

In Maryland, there are probably no naturally reproducing populations. For several years, cutthroat trout were not being stocked by DNR because of their susceptibility to whirling disease. However, a few cutthroat trout are now being stocked in the North Branch of the Potomac River each year.

