



### **93. EUROPEAN CATFISH / WALLER OR WELS (*Silurus glanis*)**

**IDENTIFICATION:** The European Catfish is the biggest freshwater fish of Middle Europe (sometimes reaching a length of 15 feet and a weight of 500 pounds). The anterior half of the body is cylindrical, the posterior part is compressed laterally. The large, flat head has a very large mouth lined with tiny teeth. The upper lip holds two long barbels, one on either side of the head: the lower lip has four shorter barbels. The body is scaleless. Color is variable: the back is normally dark with a blue-back, olive green, dark-violet, or brown tinge; the flanks dull yellowish-white dark wavelike markings. The belly often has a reddish hue. Pectoral and pelvic fin are dark with a yellowish band, which is bordered with a reddish margin in old adults. Dorsal and tail fins occasionally have a violet tinge. The iris is yellow and bordered by a small golden ring. Albino types are found occasionally.

**HABITAT:** European catfish live in large lakes and the sluggish portions of major streams with muddy bottoms. They are numerous in the Danube River and its northern tributaries. Sheatfish live solitary in deep holes and feed primarily at night. They hibernate during winter.

**FOOD:**

- (1) **Diet:** Young European catfish feed on small aquatic animals; adults are tremendous predators, preying on fish, frogs, birds and small mammals.
- (2) **Value:** Young European catfish are a much appreciated table delicacy. The European catfish is a highly regarded game fish because of its huge size and vigorous fighting qualities.

**SPAWNING:** European catfish spawn from May to June in weedy shallows. Small females produce 20,000 to 30,000 eggs: larger ones may release as many as 1 million eggs. The male guards the nest.