

CITY FISHER INSERT #12

EXOTIC FISH IDENTIFIER



BUTTERFLY PEACOCK *SIZE:* Some Florida butterfly peacock now exceed 12 pounds, but the current state record stands at only 9.1 pounds. The current International Game Fish Association (IGFA) world record caught in Venezuela is 12.6 pounds. *IDENTIFICATION:* This fish is not related to our largemouth bass, but is related instead to other cichlids such as the oscar and spotted tilapia. This bright, gold-colored fish is hard to mistake. The lower

fins are bright red, and there are three vertical black bars on the body that are more pronounced in younger fish. Unlike the familiar largemouth bass, bigger butterfly peacocks will most likely be males rather than females. Male peacocks can also be distinguished by a pronounced hump on the forehead during the breeding season. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* The speckled peacock was introduced in south Florida at the same time as the butterfly peacock. None survived, and no speckled peacock exist in Florida today. The presence of butterfly peacock with gold “speckles” on their bodies continues to confuse anglers who believe they have landed a speckled peacock.

OSCAR *SIZE:* Can exceed a foot in length; the current state record is 2.3 pounds. *IDENTIFICATION:* A dark fish, the oscar is black with variable olive to red markings on most of the body. The key identification aid is a black spot encircled by a distinct, red or orange ring on the tail. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* Although some fishes—particularly other exotics—may also possess a ring on the tail, the red or orange ring is unique to the oscar.



MAYAN CICHLID *SIZE:* To 12 inches and about 2.5 pounds. *IDENTIFICATION:* The broken lateral line and turquoise ring on the tail are diagnostic. The general coloration is olive-green with red on the chin, throat, and breast. Five to seven dark vertical stripes mark the body. Both sexes appear similar. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* The oscar has a red ring on the tail and is rounder in shape and darker in color.

MIDAS CICHLID *SIZE:* This fish may reach just over a foot in length, and can weigh over 2.5 pounds. Males tend to be larger than females. *IDENTIFICATION:* Like our other local cichlids, the Midas has a broken lateral line. This fish is unusual in being *polychromatic*—having multiple color phases (or *morphs*). The Midas cichlid may range dramatically in color from dull gray to white, orange or even red! All young start off gray and looking much like small bluegill, but most change to brightly-colored morphs, starting when they are about three inches long. In Florida, more than 80% of adults are the bright morph, but the ratio is reversed in their native range. Males and females are equally likely to be brightly colored.



The Midas cichlid may also possess a half-dozen vertical bars on the side, or may present a mottled appearance. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* The Midas cichlid has a “chunkier” appearance than the bluegill, Mayan cichlid, or blue tilapia. A pronounced forehead (or *nuchal hump*) associated with breeding may—or may not—be present. The bright morph of the Midas cichlid is hard to mistake for any other fish.

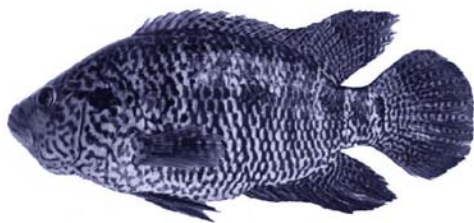


SPOTTED TILAPIA *SIZE:* Grows to 13 inches and about 3 pounds. *IDENTIFICATION:* Light green or yellow in color, the spotted tilapia is similar in shape to a sunfish, and has a similarly small mouth. The body sports six to nine distinct bars or spots along the side. Smaller individuals (such as the one in the background of the picture) tend to have bars, while the larger fish exhibit spots. Even larger spotted tilapia, however, will still show some light barring on the sides. Some fish may have reddish markings on the chin or throat area. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* The obvious bars or spots make this fish fairly easy to differentiate from the other three

species of tilapia established locally. The only other species that might cause confusion are the bluegill (a native

which lacks the broken lateral line of the cichlid family) and the Mayan cichlid (which has more red coloration and has a black spot with a turquoise ring on its tail).

BLUE TILAPIA *SIZE:* This fish grows significantly larger than its more easily caught relative, the spotted tilapia. Fish exceed 3 pounds regularly, and can attain 10. *IDENTIFICATION:* The blue tilapia might actually be most easily identified by its *lack* of distinct markings. It's flat, bream-shaped body; light blue or gray color; broken lateral line; and large size mark this species. This fish also happens to be a mouthbrooder—yellowish eggs or tiny fish fry inside the mother's mouth can help confirm this species' identity. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* The female Mozambique tilapia is almost identical, yet not nearly as large or widespread. Field differentiation is difficult, even by experienced biologists, and possible hybridization between blue and Mozambique tilapia further confuses the issue. Male Mozambique tilapia, on the other hand, have a visibly larger mouth and will be much darker—almost black—when breeding. In central Florida, anglers can assume every tilapia they observe is a blue; in southeast Florida, any tilapia over 3 pounds will likely be a blue.



JAGUAR GUAPOTE *SIZE:* The current all-tackle record is 3.5 pounds and was caught in Miami-Dade County. *IDENTIFICATION:* The broken lateral line and black-and-white patterning make this species distinct. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* The only local species that might possibly cause confusion is the black crappie. The guapote's teeth and broken lateral line instantly set it apart.

CLOWN KNIFEFISH *SIZE:* The largest specimen documented so far was actually one of the first clown knife fish reported in our area, a 31-inch specimen weighing just under 10 pounds that was caught in Lake Osborne in 1997. *IDENTIFICATION:* This flat, silvery fish is very distinctive. The uniquely-shaped body gives the knife fish its name. A tiny dorsal fin, in combination with five to ten black spots ringed with white, distinguish this fish from anything else swimming in our waters. Juveniles possess dark vertical bands instead of spots. This fish currently remains restricted to the Osborne-Ida chain of lakes. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* None. This is the only knife fish present in Florida.



SAILFIN CATFISH *SIZE:* To about 22 inches. Females tend to be smaller, and any fish larger than 18 inches is very probably male. *IDENTIFICATION:* The hard, shell-like body of this "armored" catfish and dark, wormlike markings make it difficult to mistake it for any other catfish—even with your eyes closed! *SIMILAR SPECIES:* There are two very similar species that, like the sailfin catfish, were illegally introduced from South America. The suckermouth catfish has *less than* ten dorsal fin rays (the sailfin and

vermiculated catfishes have *at least* ten). In addition, the suckermouth displays a pattern of spots on the head region, while the sailfin and vermiculated instead sport wormlike, reticulated markings there. On the vermiculated catfish, these markings extend onto the abdomen, helping distinguish it from the sailfin. The suckermouth and vermiculated catfishes are not nearly as widespread as the sailfin, being found primarily in Miami-Dade and/or Hillsborough counties.

WALKING CATFISH *SIZE:* This species can reach 20" and nearly 2 ½ pounds. *IDENTIFICATION:* This exotic is relatively easy to identify. It is a "soft" catfish, unlike other exotic "armored" varieties. Look for the long continuous dorsal fin, rounded caudal fin, and four pairs of forward-pointing barbells. This fish is usually colored various shades of gray; light-colored albinos, while rare, are also present. *SIMILAR SPECIES:* No other local catfish has the long dorsal fin and rounded caudal fin of the "walker".

