

The Carp-O-Rama Handbook:

everything you need to know about
catching, prepping and eating
common carp



Family Fishing Events 2014

Sponsored by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, events will be held at venues across the state. Look for the Family Fishing Trailer where loaner rods and reels, bait and fishing instruction are available free to participants. This is the perfect opportunity for people of all ages who have never been fishing or haven't fished for years to learn. All participants ages 16 or older need a 2014 fishing license (OutdoorNebraska.org for permits). For the calendar of additional events and detailed information visit: FamilyFishing.OutdoorNebraska.gov

Fun Activities

Demonstrations will be offered at each event to give instruction, with emphasis on "how to." Learn from the experts about the following:

- **Fish Cleaning** – *You catch them, we'll show you how to clean them.*
- **Fishing Techniques** – *Look for events for advanced fishing techniques.*
- **Family Activities** – *Something for everyone: games, displays...fun!*

Special Events

**These events offer a variety of fun outdoor activities.
All are Family Friendly and FREE*.**

**Park Permit may be required.*

Carp-O-Ramas at Pawnee SRA and Maloney SRA will offer instruction on carp fishing and we will also be serving your catch with all the trimmings, along with many other fun activities.

Kearney Family Outdoor Discovery Day (mid-May) and **Ponca EXPO** (mid-September) will help you discover fishing, bowfishing, and dozens of other hunting and outdoor activities.

Family Fish and Camp Join us for fishing and stay the night to learn how to camp with your family. Visit www.NebraskaBOW.com for details. Registration required for camping participation.



Nebraska Urban
Fisheries Program



NEBRASKA
— GAME — PARKS —

See You Out There



Visit us at www.FamilyFishing.OutdoorNebraska.gov to find us on Facebook and stay updated on additional events throughout the summer!

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Carp Fishing in Nebraska

By Daryl Bauer

NGPC Fisheries Outreach Program Manager

Common carp are found in a variety of lakes, reservoirs, pits, ponds, rivers and streams in Nebraska. Carp populations can be high in some of those waters, and anglers can expect to catch lots of fish. On the other hand, some Nebraska waters offer fewer carp, but those fish can be trophies weighing well over 20 pounds.

Regardless of number or size, carp are most active and most likely to be caught when the water is warm. In early spring anglers should “think warm.” Areas where water temperatures can warm a few degrees on a sunny afternoon or after a few nice days can attract a variety of fish in the spring, including carp. Look for carp in shallow water. Marshy areas are particularly



good in early spring, but the back end of bays or shallow shoreline flats can attract fish, too. One easy way to find carp any time of year, particularly in spring, is to put on polarized sunglasses and look for them! Cast where you can see them roaming; those are fish that are searching for food.

As the seasons progress, common carp will scatter throughout the waters they inhabit. During the summer, common carp can be caught at a variety of depths on a wide variety of baits, but anglers can still find carp by watching for signs of feeding fish. Look for wakes and disturbances on the surface of the water, roiled bottom substrates or the fish themselves. Although carp can inhabit deep water, anglers do not have to fish deep to catch them even during the warmest water of the year. Feeding carp will often be found in relatively shallow water, usually less than 10 feet deep. Wind-swept shorelines are good places to find carp feeding on the bottom on a variety of aquatic insects or other food items. The very best spots tend to be shoreline points and pockets where the wind and shore currents tend to concentrate food and hungry carp.

Anglers also should watch for carp gulping food items caught in surface currents. Those fish will be seen easily on the surface. In addition, from late spring through summer, anglers who pursue carp in pits and ponds

should pay special attention to any mulberry



trees that hang over the water. Carp love to feed on mulberries! On Nebraska reservoirs, anglers can find carp roaming flats and shorelines. Some fly-anglers stalk and catch those fish just as they would bonefish in the Florida Keys.

As waters cool in the fall, common carp will again frequent areas where the water warms in the afternoon. Fish in bays and sun-exposed shorelines until waters become cold and carp head for deeper water to spend the winter.

On rivers and streams, carp are usually found in or near deep, slack-water holes during cold-water periods. As waters warm, fish disperse and move into tributaries and connected waters. During flood events carp will head for the shallows and thrive in flooded terrestrial habitats. In flowing waters, carp tend to feed away from the strongest currents and prefer slack water, but you may find them at current seams just outside of the main flow.

Common carp are not often caught during the winter. However, at times, especially on rivers and streams, anglers can locate carp aggregating in holes in late fall/early winter and again in early spring and can catch some of those fish. Carp fishing during the heart of the winter tends to be unproductive, but at times, especially as ice-out nears, carp can be caught through the ice. Ice-anglers targeting panfish or larger game fish occasionally incidentally catch carp through the ice, but few anglers target carp while ice-fishing.

On a daily basis, carp are often active during the middle of the day. Yet anglers will find some of the best fishing early and late in the day, especially during summer months. Likewise, anytime the wind blows carp feeding activity can pick up, even during midday. When water temperatures are cool in early spring and fall, afternoon and early evening will tend to produce the most carp feeding activity.

Why Carp?



Say “carp” to many fishermen, and they’ll turn up their noses and walk away. But, these hardy fish are gallant fighters and make mighty good eating besides. They battle as well or better than many of the more sought-after game fish. When properly prepared, they taste a good deal better than some so-called game species. Still, because of his hardiness, his general disdain for artificial lures, and his ability to outcompete game fishes, the carp ranks low on the angler’s preferred list.

Even so, some folks will take the carp over any of his esteemed cousins. Fishing for carp offers thrills, action, and meat when other fish refuse to bite. Carp are often willing takers at midday at such places as Gavins Point, when other species play hard to get. Carp inhabit almost every stream and weed-free lake in Nebraska and, in most cases are here to stay. Consequently they can provide many hours of pleasure for anglers, archers, and spearmen, while requiring little more than a few miles drive from the house.

Carp Fishing Tips

To attract carp, chum (bait) a spot using corn, rotten potatoes or soaked oats. One to two pounds of bait per 10 feet of fishable shoreline per day is plenty. Results should be noticeable within six hours after baiting.

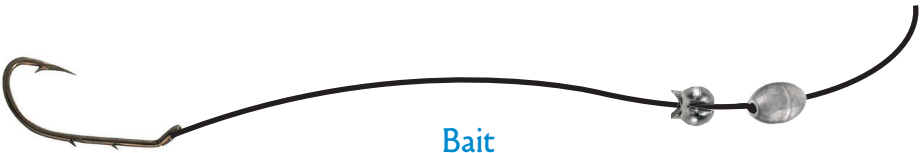
Carp fishing should be done with a slack line. The bait should be cast out, allowed to sink to the bottom, dragged for a short distance to straighten out the hooks and then 3-4 feet of slack line should be spooled out after the pole is in position. Set the reel drag low; otherwise you risk having your rod pulled into the water when the carp flees. When you feel a steady pull, set the hook, adjust the drag, and get ready to do battle with one of the toughest fighters in the fresh water!

Rod and Reel

Rods designed specifically for carp fishing are available but not necessary. Choose a casting or spinning reel that will hold 120 yards of 8- to 12-pound test fishing line. The weight of the line should match the weight of the fish you are hoping to catch. Use a medium weight rod at least 5½ feet long, with some flexibility.

Rig

A No. 2 bait-holder hook on a 12-inch leader below a split shot or swivel and sliding egg weight is a very good rig for carp. The sliding sinker allows the carp to pick up and sample the bait without feeling resistance. Avoid using bobbers since carp will quickly move on if resistance is detected when sampling bait.



Canned corn or homemade dough balls are inexpensive and effective baits. Dough baits can be prepared with just about anything in the kitchen cabinet, and proven recipes abound online. Follow this basic recipe from NGPC's own Greg Wagner, transcribed from NPR's All Things Considered (2006), then get creative with your own additions like molasses or anise seed to enhance your doughbait's appeal!

Wagner: And I'm in the kitchen, bringing three cups of water to a boil, and I'm adding about, ah, three tablespoons of strawberry-flavored Jell-O. And then I'm slowly adding, while stirring, a couple cups of yellow cornmeal, one cup of flour. I turn down the heat, and then still kind of stirring, cooking for about five minutes. I let this dough cool, and then I refrigerate in a plastic bag. Wait a short bit. We're off to carp fish.

Common Carp

Cyprinus carpio

Family: Cyprinidae (Minnow)



Description: A heavy-bodied fish with a long dorsal fin, large, thick scales, two barbels (on either side of the upper jaw) and a stout, saw-toothed spine at the front of both dorsal and anal fins. Typically, color varies from brassy yellow or green, to golden brown, or even silvery. Individuals 12-25 inches in length and weighing up to 8-10 pounds are common, although they can grow much larger. The Nebraska state record for common carp is a 50 pound, 5 ounce fish taken by bowfishing in 2010. A genetic variation called the mirror carp differs only by having over-enlarged scales, a patchy, uneven scale pattern or no scales.

Range: Found statewide, common carp are a native species of Asia that was transported to Europe and then the United States as a food resource and at one time was stocked widely by various state fish commissions. Common carp are omnivorous, consuming a variety of animal and plant material, and primarily feed on the bottom but will also suck in objects floating on the surface. Their aggressive feeding activities (uprooting plants and roiling bottom sediments) can make the water very muddy.

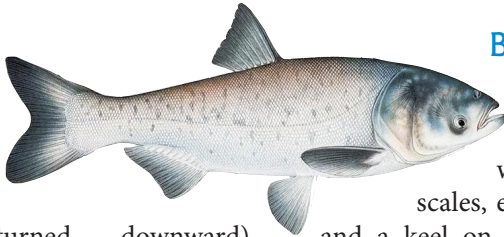
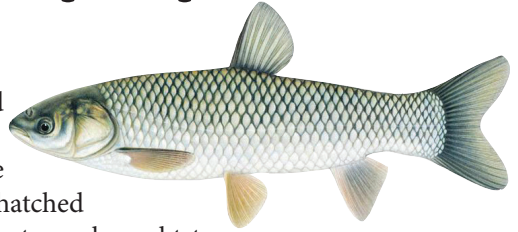
Other Carp Species

Grass Carp

Ctenopharyngodon idella

Description: Robust, cigar-shaped fish with a broad, blunt head and terminal, horizontal mouth. Large dark-edged scales with a cross-hatched appearance. Native of eastern Asia that was brought to Arkansas waters and escaped. Jumps out of water to avoid being captured. Adults have voracious appetites and primarily consume large amounts of aquatic vegetation but will also eat a wide variety of plant and animal material when preferred plants are unavailable. It is inefficient in digesting plant material, passing about half of it through undigested; the released nutrients can cause extensive algae blooms.

Range: Missouri River and has been stocked in selected reservoirs, sandpits, and ponds statewide.



Bighead Carp

Hypophthalmichthys nobilis

Description: Heavy-bodied fish with large head, upturned mouth, small scales, eyes in lower portion of head (usually turned downward), and a keel on the belly. Native of China that was introduced to Arkansas waters and escaped. This filter feeder consumes plankton (microscopic plants and animals) and suspended detritus (dead plant material). Competes with native planktivores (paddlefish, buffalo, and young of many other native species).

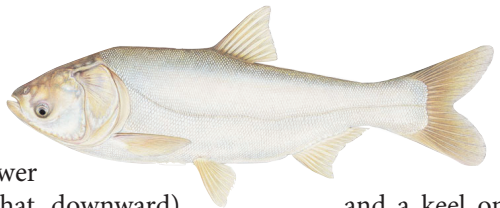
Range: Missouri River, lower reaches of most tributary streams, and in plunge pools below dams of many southeast Nebraska reservoirs.

Silver Carp

Hypophthalmichthys molitrix

Description: A silvery, heavy-bodied fish with large head, upturned mouth, small scales, eyes forward in lower portion of head (projecting somewhat downward), and a keel on the belly. Native of China that was brought to Arkansas waters and escaped. A very efficient filter feeder that consumes zooplankton (microscopic invertebrates), detritus (particulate organic matter), and algae. Competes with native planktivores (such as paddlefish and buffalo) and young of many other native fish. Adults leap out of water when disturbed.

Range: Open waters of pools and backwaters in channels of Missouri River and lower portions of tributary rivers.



Skinning & Scoring Carp



1
Gather tools to clean a carp: pliers, file knife, kitchen shears



2
With carp positioned on its belly, cut a small piece of skin from right behind the head.



3
Insert knife into cut and slide along midline just beneath skin from head to tail on both sides.



4
Using pliers, pull the dorsal fin off of the fish from tail forward.



5
With carp on its back, position the knife directly behind the pectoral fins and make a shallow cut.



6
Slide the knife toward the vent, removing the belly skin and pelvic fins.



Insert knife along each side of anal fin, making a shallow cut to the tail. Remove anal fin with pliers.



Make a cut through the skin from top of fish to bottom directly behind gill plates.



Using pliers, pull skin from body from head to tail.



Use fingers to help separate skin from flesh.



Remove head and tail. Empty body cavity and rinse meat clean.



To prepare for frying, score the flesh with slices to the spine, spaced 1/8 - 1/4 inch apart.

Eating Carp

Fried Carp

Ingredients:

One 2-3 lb. scored carp, cut into 4 sections
1 cup flour
1 cup cornmeal
1 tsp seasoned salt

Blend dry ingredients. Dredge carp sections in flour mixture making sure dry ingredients are worked into the scores. Deep-fry at 375 degrees until golden brown. When fried crispy, the bones become brittle enough to consume.



Baked Stuffed Carp

Ingredients:

One 2-3 lb. carp scored carp
2 cups soft bread crumbs
1 tsp minced onion
1/2 cup chopped celery
1 tbsp lemon juice
3 tbsp melted butter
2 tbsp water
2 tbsp minced parsley
1 cup cooked rice
2 cups mushrooms
Salt and pepper to taste

Rub fish inside and out with salt. Stir remaining ingredients together and stuff inside body cavity. Brush the outside of the fish with butter. Bake at 350 degrees F for 15 minutes per pound.

Smoked Carp

Ingredients:

2-3 lb. carp, filleted
Salt

Wet fillets and roll in salt. Let rest for 10-15 minutes. Place fillet in smoker heated to 180 degrees F for 4-8 hours using maple, apple, hickory, or cherry wood. When done, meat will fall in tender flakes when touched with a fork.

Canned Carp

Ingredients:

approx. 1 lb. filleted carp
1 tbsp canning salt
1 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp white vinegar
1/2 tsp au jus gravy mix
2 tbsp ketchup (optional)

Cut fillets in 2-inch chunks. Fill a quart jar with cubed carp. Add remaining ingredients to each quart jar. The addition of ketchup imparts a salmon-like flavor. Do not add water; fish will form its own juices. Process as per cannery directions (generally 90 minutes at 10 lb.). Use in place of canned tuna or salmon.

Take the Next Step

...to better family fishing



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