

Northern Snakehead

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division recently confirmed the presence of the non-native northern snakehead fish (*Channa argus*) in Gwinnett County. This is the first documented occurrence of snakeheads in the wild in Georgia.

NORTHERN SNAKEHEAD IDENTIFICATION

Snakehead



	Snakehead	Bowfin
Anal Fin	Very long, 18 rays, more than half the length of the dorsal fin	Short, 12 rays, less than half the length of the dorsal fin
Head	Pointed and flattened dorsally	Large and rounded
Jaw	Lower jaw protrudes past upper jaw with pointed teeth	Lower jaw is shorter than upper

Bowfin



Snakehead illustration by Susan Trammel, usgs.gov; Bowfin illustration by Duane Raver

IF YOU BELIEVE YOU CAUGHT A NORTHERN SNAKEHEAD

- **DO NOT RELEASE IT.**
- Kill it immediately (remember, it can survive on land) and freeze it.
- If possible, take pictures of the fish, including close ups of its mouth, fins and tail.
- Note where it was caught (waterbody, landmarks or GPS coordinates).
- Report it to your regional Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division Fisheries Office (<https://georgiawildlife.com/about/contact#fish>)

Northern Snakehead Facts

- Northern snakehead are native to China, Russia and Korea.
- They have been reported in 14 states and the District of Columbia, and are established in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and Arkansas.
- The species is similar in appearance to the bowfin, a native Georgia fish that lives in swamps, rivers, and streams throughout the state.
- They can be distinguished from bowfin by their distinctive color pattern, having a background color of golden tan to pale brown and dark blotches saddled across its back and sides.
- Snakeheads are air-breathers, capable of survival in poorly oxygenated waters, making them very adaptable and able to survive most conditions in Georgia and the southern United States.
- They prefer to live in shallow stagnant ponds and wetlands with mud substrate or aquatic vegetation and slow muddy streams, but also can occur in rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs and canals.
- Northern snakeheads can reach sizes up to 33 inches long.
- Northern snakeheads are described as a voracious predator on other fishes and crustaceans.
- Impact to native Georgia species is unknown. Effects in other southern states have been undesirable, but not extreme.
- In Georgia, it is unlawful to import, transport, sell, transfer, or possess any species of snakehead fish without a valid wild animal license.

Here's how anglers can help:

- Learn how to identify northern snakehead.
- Dispose of aquarium animals and plants in the garbage, not in water bodies.
- Dispose of all bait in trash cans, at disposal stations, or above the waterline on dry land.
- Dump water from boat compartments, bait buckets, and live wells on dry land.

If you believe you have caught a northern snakehead:

- **DO NOT RELEASE IT.**
- Kill it immediately (remember, it can survive on land) and freeze it.
- If possible, take pictures of the fish, including close ups of its mouth, fins and tail.
- Note where it was caught (waterbody, landmarks or GPS coordinates).
- Report it to your regional Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division Fisheries Office (<https://georgiawildlife.com/about/contact#fish>).

For additional information on northern snake heads,
<https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?speciesid=2265>

Citation: Fuller, P.L., Benson, A.J., Nunez, G., Fusaro, A., and Neilson, M., 2019, *Channa argus* (Cantor, 1842): U.S. Geological Survey, Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database, Gainesville, FL, <https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?speciesid=2265>, Revision Date: 7/31/2019, Peer Review Date: 4/1/2016, Access Date: 10/8/2019