Walking Catfish
Invasive species waddles across Florida

For the complete photos with media resources, visit: http://education.nationalgeographic.org/media/walking-catfish-wbt/

The walking catfish is a major invasive species in the U.S. state of Florida.

The walking catfish is native to Asia, common in ponds and freshwater fish farms from Pakistan to the Philippines. The fish's ability to survive in stagnant water makes it a valuable source of food, especially in Southeast Asia.

In the 1960s, aquaculture farmers in Florida imported the fish. Within 10 years, the fish spread to 20 counties in the state.

The walking catfish was able to spread so quickly because of two unusual adaptations: it can breathe air, allowing it to survive out of water, and it can use its spiny front fins to waddle from wetland to wetland.

Mostly, walking catfish navigate the wetlands and canals of southern Florida. They have also been recorded as far west as California and as far north as Massachusetts.

Walking catfish put few native species at risk, as an array of wading birds, such as herons and egrets, are natural predators. However, they often feed in aquaculture ponds, "walking" from fish farm to fish farm, preying on the fish there and causing millions of dollars in damage.

Vocabulary

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>adaptation</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>a modification of an organism or its parts that makes it more fit for existence. An adaptation is passed from generation to generation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>aquaculture</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>the art and science of cultivating marine or freshwater life for food and industry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>array</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>large group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>canal</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>artificial waterway.</td>
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<tr>
<td>fish farming</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>art and science of raising and harvesting fish and other seafood, such as shrimp or crabs.</td>
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</table>
food  noun  material, usually of plant or animal origin, that living organisms use to obtain nutrients.
freshwater  noun  water that is not salty.
import  verb  to bring in a good or service from another area for trade.
invasive species  noun  type of plant or animal that is not indigenous to a particular area and causes economic or environmental harm.
native species  noun  species that occur naturally in an area or habitat. Also called indigenous species.
navigate  verb  to plan and direct the course of a journey.
predator  noun  animal that hunts other animals for food.
prey  noun  animal that is hunted and eaten by other animals.
wading bird  noun  bird with long, thin legs adapted for walking and feeding in shallow water.
wetland  noun  area of land covered by shallow water or saturated by water.

Articles & Profiles
- National Geographic Environment: Attack of the Alien Invaders
- National Geographic News: Catfish Hunts on Land, Scientists Report

Maps
- USGS: Nonindigenous Aquatic Species—Clarias batrachus

Websites
- Florida Museum of Natural History: Ichthyology—Walking Catfish
- U.S. Department of Agriculture: National Invasive Species Information Center
- Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health
- National Invasive Species Council

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