

Crappie and Bluegill



Black Crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*)



Bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*)

Crappie and bluegill, collectively known as “panfish”, are two of the more popular game fish in Lake Berryessa. Although they are small in size, they remain popular for anglers because of high daily limits for both fish.

Bluegill, and their relative the red-eared sunfish (*Lepomis microlophus*), are the smallest of Berryessa’s game fish (less than .5 pounds). These ideal beginner fish exist in high abundance and are easily caught in nearly any shallow cove, weed bed, or dock area. They generally live in small schools, and feed on native flies and small minnows. Bluegill are best caught with a bobber and a small hook holding a piece of nightcrawler or minnow. Although they are most prevalent during the warm summer months, they can be found year-round in most shallow areas (less than 6 feet).

Crappie (pronounced *crop-ie*), are slightly larger than bluegill (1.5 pounds maximum), and are popular because of their flaky, white meat. These fish can be hard to find, especially during the summer when they move to deeper water. However, as any angler would report, where there’s one, there are more. Crappie run in schools, making large crappie catches relatively common. Crappie are best caught in the spring, under coverings such as a dock, vegetation, or a fallen tree. For the best luck, try using a red and white mini-jig or a bobber with a minnow to lure these elusive fish.

Trout and Salmon



Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*)



Steelhead/Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)

Trout and salmon, traditionally regarded as cold water fish, are inhabitants of the deep, open waters of Lake Berryessa, and can often reach “trophy” sizes of more than 10 pounds (the average size is 2-4 pounds). These fish are best caught by trolling – dragging a spinner or minnow on a line behind a slow moving boat in open water – a method made easier with the help of a downrigger or fish finder. During the spring, trout and salmon swim at depths around 15-20 feet. In the summer they are generally found below 40 feet.

Another method used to catch trout or salmon is to drift a minnow, nightcrawler, or salmon eggs in open water using a bobber. Shore fishing has proven less successful for these fish, but it is possible during the spring when the water temperatures are still cool. Fly fishing is rarely practiced at Lake Berryessa, but it is possible in Upper Putah Creek, and is extremely popular below the dam in Lower Putah Creek. Time, patience, and experience are all necessary to catch these fish.

Rainbow trout are the most common trout species; however brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) and brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) also exist. Landlocked steelhead (pictured) are native to the region, and spawn in Upper Putah Creek during the spring months. All other trout are stocked annually. Several other types of salmon also exist in the lake: chinook salmon and kokanee (*onchorhynchus nerka*), which were recently introduced near Markley Cove.

Bass



Largemouth Bass (*Micropterus salmoides*)



Smallmouth Bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*)

Because of the technique and skill required to catch these fish, and the thrill of hooking a large one, many anglers consider bass to be the ultimate game fish of Lake Berryessa. The largemouth (15-20 inches) is slightly larger than the smallmouth (12-18 inches), and both fish spawn in the spring, when they can be found feeding in shallow areas for most of the day.

To fish for bass, it is important to know some basic information about their feeding habits. In the summer, bass generally spend their days and nights resting in deeper water, but they move to shallow warm water to feed in the morning and evening. These areas usually have vegetation or other structures that attract minnows, flies, or other small creatures which bass feed on. In addition, these shallow areas tend to be close to the deep waters where bass rest - therefore, many anglers fish for them along points or steep ridges, and the shallow vegetated areas along the edge. Fishermen often say that rocky points, floating vegetation, docks, or coves filled with trees are prime bass habitats.

Another tricky part about bass fishing is finding the right bait. Every angler seems to have their own belief about the best bass lure. The most popular seem to be floating plugs, spinner baits, rattling lures, plastic worms, or a simple live worm or minnow. Whichever bait you use, fishing for bass is sure to be an exciting experience if you keep their feeding habits in mind.

Catfish



Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*)



Bullhead Catfish (*Ictalurus nebulosus*)

Catfish, the bottom feeders of Lake Berryessa, are abundant and easily caught in nearly every part of the lake. The channel and bullhead catfish (pictured) are the most common species, although the white catfish (*Ameiurus catus*) also exists. Dead organic matter is the normal diet of catfish. The average size for these fish is 2-4 pounds, however they can grow enormous in the deeper parts of the lake, often exceeding 20 pounds.

Many anglers say that catching catfish requires the least skill of any type of fishing. The one method which nearly all anglers use to catch catfish is to simply sink natural bait to the bottom of the lake, keep the line taught, and wait for a bite. The baits most widely used include nightcrawlers, chicken livers, clams, hot dogs, or anything with a strong odor. Placing a small bell or bobber at the end of a taught line, which alerts the angler to the fish strike, makes fishing for catfish a carefree and widely successful experience.

There are a few feeding habits of catfish that an angler should keep in mind. Although they feed all day long, catfish are most active during the night, which is why anglers generally wait until the sun sets to lure these fish in shallow water (10-20 feet). If you do fish for catfish during the day, keep in mind that they will be best found in deeper water (30 feet or more). Whichever way you fish for catfish, you will likely be surprised by the good luck you will have here at Lake Berryessa.

Other Fish at Berryessa



Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*)



Sacramento Squawfish (*Ptychocheilus grandis*)

Although not generally popular among anglers, Lake Berryessa supports several other types of fish besides the common game fish. The most prevalent of these is the carp, a large orange colored fish, in the same family as goldfish, which feed on organic matter. Originally from Asia, carp are the most widespread introduced fish species in U.S. lakes and streams, and tend to compete with native fish for food and space. Carp can often be seen circling among the weeds in nearly every shallow cove around Lake Berryessa. They feed by stirring up the mud and capturing the organic matter which escapes. One of their favorites is fish eggs, which makes them especially unpopular among anglers. Although often regarded as inedible by local anglers, carp are considered a delicacy in many cultures, and put up a thrilling fight when hooked.

Another fish which Berryessa supports is the native Sacramento squawfish, often referred to as the “pikeminnow”. These large silver fish are actually giant minnows, and often fool anglers who are pursuing the more popular trout or bass. They are often considered inedible because of their bony meat, but, like the carp, they put up a strong fight for the angler who hooks them.

Berryessa contains a wide array of minnows, including the golden shiner (*Notemigonus crysoleucas*) and the threadfin shad (*Dorosoma petenense*). Lake Berryessa’s waters also support many other species of fresh water organisms including crayfish, clams, and otters.

Mercury Advisory

While consuming fish is undoubtedly an enjoyable part of fishing, some precautions should be taken given the elevated levels of mercury in fish from Lake Berryessa. Mercury, a naturally occurring chemical, is hazardous when ingested in high doses. A great number of oceans and lakes, including Lake Berryessa, support fish which have high levels of mercury built up in their tissues, primarily due to early gold mining operations upstream.

Mercury has always existed in the air and soils in its elemental form since the beginning of time. Recently, certain mining and industrial practices have released higher levels of mercury into the environment. Bacteria that live in sediments at the bottom of water bodies convert this inorganic mercury into its toxic organic form, methyl mercury. This methyl mercury binds to soil sediments which small invertebrates feed on, which in turn builds up in the tissues of these small creatures, and then gets passed up through the food chain to larger predatory fish. Through the process of bioaccumulation, the mercury becomes more concentrated in the higher levels of the food chain. Therefore, larger predatory fish have higher levels of mercury, which then gets passed on to the organisms that eat those fish, such as eagles or humans. When consumed in high doses, mercury can cause neurological harm to humans.

In light of this potential contamination, anglers should keep in mind that eating excessive amounts of fish from Lake Berryessa, or from many other lakes and oceans, may be harmful. Therefore, as with any food, fish from this lake should be eaten in moderation. The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) suggests that women of childbearing age and children under 17 should not consume fish from Lake Berryessa. However, men and older women can safely eat the following amounts of fish per month:

Fish Species	Maximum Meals Per Month
Largemouth bass over 15”	2
Largemouth bass under 15”	4
Smallmouth bass all sizes	2
White catfish all sizes	4

Channel catfish	6
Rainbow trout all sizes	20

More specific and current information regarding mercury in fish in U.S. oceans and lakes can be found from OEHHA’s website at <http://www.oehha.ca.gov/fish.html>, or by calling (510) 622-3170 or (916) 327-7319.

Fishing License Information

The California Fish and Game Commission requires that all individuals 16 years and older purchase an annual license before fishing in any area in California. The penalty for being caught without a proper license can be costly, so it is best to always keep your license up to date.

The cost for a license varies from year to year, different prices apply for non-residents, and one and two day passes are available. Areas around Lake Berryessa where a license can be purchased are Markley Cove Resort, Steele Park Resort, Spanish Flat Resort, Lake Berryessa Marina Resort, and Turtle Rock restaurant. Maps to these locations are available at the Reclamation Visitor Center, Administration Office, Oak Shores Park, and on our website.

Daily Fishing Limits

Fishing is open year-round on Lake Berryessa. Specific daily limits have been set on certain fish species to ensure that their populations remain stable. These limits fluctuate annually, so please see the California Department of Fish and Game regulations for allowable catch limits each year for trout, salmon, bass, and catfish.

All other species, including bullhead catfish, bluegill, and carp, have no set limits. All bass must be at least 12 inches in order to be removed from the lake. For more information regarding fishing regulations or licenses, please contact the California Department of Fish and Game at (916) 227- 2245, or visit their website at <http://www.fgc.ca.gov/html/fishregs.html>.

**Thank you for visiting Lake Berryessa,
and GOOD LUCK!**

*Brochure created by Park Ranger Bradford Mills
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Fish photos courtesy of René C. Reyes, Bureau of Reclamation*

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West



Fishing at Lake Berryessa



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region

http://www.usbr.gov/mp/ccao/field_offices/lake_berryessa/index.html