



WILDLIFE FACTFLIE: European bullhead

The European bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) is a small fish with a large mouth, large pectoral fins, prominent eyes, wide flat head and tapering body that can be 8-12cm long. They are brown with a mottled pattern and have pale undersides. During the spawning period, male bullheads become black with a white-tipped dorsal fin, while females become plump. European bullheads can be found in stony freshwater streams, rivers and lakes, and you can see them here all year round but most easily at dusk. They live on the bottom of the stream, river or lake and feed on invertebrates such as mayfly and caddisfly larvae, as well as the eggs of other fish. They show a preference for fast flowing, shallow water bodies, with the large pectoral fin allowing the fish to hold their position in fast flowing water. European bullheads lay their eggs in March and April underneath stones or in pits and the male guards and cares for them until they hatch, although he may eat a few of the youngsters if they come close enough!

The European bullhead is widely distributed, but not common, in England and Wales with limited distribution in Scotland. Nationally the population is thought to be declining due to the lowering of the water table and changes in drainage due to agricultural and forestry pressures. Due to the European significance of the UK population the bullhead is listed in Annex II of the EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, which has been translated into UK legislation and is known as the Habitat Regulations of 1994.

DID YOU KNOW?

European bullheads are crepuscular. This means that they spend their days and nights hiding under stones, venturing out at dawn and dusk to hunt for prey.

