

Pumpkinseed in Onondaga Lake



- **Scientific Name:** *Lepomis gibbosus*
- **Habitat:** Warm-water shallow ponds, lakes, and slow-moving streams.
- **Spawning Time:** Spring, mostly from May through June, but may spawn through August.
- **Spawning Locations:** Sandy, gravel or muck bottom in one to six feet of water.
- **Age at Maturity:** Pumpkinseed usually reach sexual maturity at ages 2-3, when they are about 3-5 inches in length.
- **Spawning Behavior:** Pumpkinseed males construct circular nests by sweeping away bottom debris. Nests average 5-15 inches in diameter and are usually part of a colony that can number over 100 nests. The original male may use a nest two or three times during mating season. Males defend territories around their nests vigorously. It is common for several females to mate with one male over the same nest, this results in a large number of fertilized eggs per nest. The male guards and fans the amber colored eggs to aerate and protect them 7-10 days after spawning. Pumpkinseed males have been observed collecting stray fry in their mouths and returning them to their nest. After the fry depart the male may clean his nest and attract another set of females to spawn with.
- **Number of Young Produced:** Females usually produce 600-5,000 eggs, depending on their size. The eggs are about 0.04 inches in diameter and stick to stones in the bottom of the nest. Since more than one female may lay eggs in a single males nest the total number of fry produced from a single nest is highly variable. In one study 14,600 fry were collected from a single nest.
- **Larval Characteristics:** At 80° F it takes only 3 days for the eggs to hatch, it takes a few days longer at lower temperatures. The young are about 0.20 inches long at hatching. They begin feeding on plankton (tiny animals suspended in the water) and switch to larger prey like water insects, and fish eggs as they grow. Two-year old pumpkinseeds are about 3 to 4 inches long.
- **Life Span:** May live up to 10 years.
- **Size in Onondaga Lake:** Pumpkinseeds ranging from 6 to 8 inches long are very common along the shore of the lake, making them an excellent species for children to fish for in Onondaga Lake.