

MUSKELLUNGE *Esox masquinongy*

Esox: an old European name for pike.

masquinongy: from the Native American words *mashk*: deformed;
kinonga: pike.



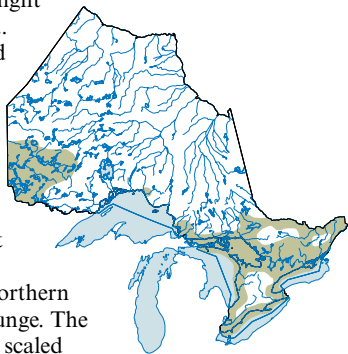
In 1988, the largest Muskellunge angled in Canada (weighing 29.5 kg) was captured in Georgian Bay and, at that time, was considered to be the fourth-largest Muskellunge ever caught. Since then, two Muskellunge, believed to be larger and caught in the 1950s, have been deemed hoaxes based on forensic examination of their photographs. The only Muskellunge now considered larger is also suspect. It's quite possible that the Georgian Bay fish may one day become the undisputed world-record Muskellunge.

DESCRIPTION: The Muskellunge is a very large, elongate fish. It has a partially scaled cheek and a partially scaled gill cover (p. 262). There are 12–18 **pores** on the underside of the lower jaw (6–9 on each side), and each gill **membrane** has 16–19 rays (p. 263). It has very small scales (132–167 lateral scales). The colour pattern is variable, but can generally be described as dark markings on a light background. The back may be green-gold, brown, grey, or silver. The sides are lighter, and the belly is creamy to milky white. The head and body may be covered with dark blotches, wavy bars, or both, or may lack them altogether. Fins are green to reddish brown with dark blotches. Juveniles up to about 15 cm in length are pale with a dark back and have black blotches or bars on the side. There is a small dark vertical bar below the eye in the juvenile, which disappears as the fish grows.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The Northern Pike has a fully scaled cheek, a total of 10 **pores** on the underside of the lower jaw, 14–15 rays in each gill **membrane**, and a colour pattern of light bars or spots on a dark background.

The Grass Pickerel has a fully scaled cheek and gill cover, a total of 8 **pores** on the underside of the lower jaw and 11–14 rays in each gill **membrane**. The juvenile Grass Pickerel has a pale lateral stripe.

Adult Grass Pickerel have 15–23 irregular dark bars and a prominent dark vertical bar below the eye. The **hybrid** between Muskellunge and Northern Pike is known as the Tiger Muskellunge. The Tiger Muskellunge often has a fully scaled



Barred



Silver



Spotted

cheek, a total of 10–16 **pores** on the underside of the lower jaw, and typically a colour pattern of irregular dark bars and spots on a light background.

FEEDING: The Muskellunge is an **ambush predator**, waiting motionless in weed beds to strike at prey. Adults feed almost exclusively on fishes and other vertebrates, such as frogs, mice, muskrats, and ducklings, making up a small percentage of their diet. There is a relationship between its size and prey size, with larger adults seizing only larger prey species. Young Muskellunge feed on large **zooplankton** and aquatic insects for the first few weeks of their life.

Muskellunge (continued)



Juvenile



Tiger Muskellunge

REPRODUCTION: Spawning begins in spring when the water temperature reaches 10°C. Muskellunge home to their birthplace spawning grounds over shallow, heavily vegetated floodplains of streams or lakes. A larger female is approached by one or two smaller males. They swim together then roll, putting their ventral surfaces close together. Eggs and sperm are released. This is repeated many times over the week-long spawning period. A nest is not built, nor is parental care provided to the eggs or young. The fertilized eggs are scattered over the vegetation and hatch in about two weeks.

HABITAT: The Muskellunge is found in the cool waters of lakes and larger streams, usually near aquatic plants, particularly wild rice.

STATUS: G5; N5; S4.

Maximum Age: 30	Ontario Average	Ontario Record	World Record
Length:	96.5 cm (38.0 in)	147.3 cm (58.0 in)	183.0 cm (72.0 in)
Weight: Overall	–	29.5 kg (65.0 lbs)	31.8 kg (70.1 lbs)
Angling	–	29.5 kg (65.0 lbs)	30.6 kg (67.5 lbs)

NORTHERN PIKE *Esox lucius*

Esox: an old European name for pike.
lucius: pike.



The Northern Pike is one of the most common fishes in Ontario, except in the Kawarthas and Algonquin Park. These areas of Ontario were isolated soon after the last Ice Age, which prevented Northern Pike from colonizing their lakes and streams.

DESCRIPTION: The Northern Pike is a large, elongate fish. It has a fully scaled cheek and a partially scaled gill cover (p. 262). There are a total of 10 **pores** on the underside of the lower jaw (5 on each side), and each gill **membrane** usually has 14–15 rays (p. 263). It has very small scales (105–148 lateral scales). The colour pattern is variable, but can generally be described as light markings on a dark background. Background colour varies from green to brown and is dark on the back fading to creamy white on the belly. In juveniles up to about 38 cm long, the light markings are shaped into 8–12 pale bars, which gradually break up into small bean-shaped spots as the fish grows. The tail and the dorsal and anal fins are yellow, green, orange or pale red, and blotched with irregular black marks. There is a small dark vertical bar below the eye in the juvenile, which disappears as the fish grows.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The Muskellunge has a partially scaled cheek, a total of 12–18 **pores** on the underside of the lower jaw, 16–19 rays in each gill **membrane**, and a colour pattern of dark bars or spots on a light background. The Grass Pickerel has a fully-scaled gill cover, usually a total of 8 **pores** on the underside of the lower jaw, and 11–14 rays in each gill **membrane**. The juvenile Grass Pickerel has a pale lateral stripe. The adult Grass Pickerel has 15–23 irregular dark bars and a prominent dark vertical bar below the eye. The hybrid between Muskellunge and Northern Pike is known as the Tiger Muskellunge. The Tiger Muskellunge has characteristics intermediate to the two parent species, and typically a colour pattern of irregular dark bars and spots on a light background.

