

## The Longnose Dace

I am so happy that the child of one of our benthic monitors tagged along this month to do some fishing while the crew picked bugs at our River Ridge site. He was there to fish for smallmouth bass, but in the time I was there, he was poking around for crawfish bait. Just like the adults kicked up the rocks to loosen the insects for the benthic monitoring, he kicked and netted for bait. In his efforts, he caught a small fish in a hand net.

Of course, I had no idea what it was. Small. Fish-like. Definitely fishy. I snapped a picture, and hoped I could figure it out. I pulled out my Freshwater Fishes of the Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland, & Delaware book. This book has a dichotomous key to help me get into the correct family and pretty decent color photos and range maps to boot.

So, counting fins and checking the positioning of the mouth, size, checking for lateral lines...I settled on longnose dace, *Rhinichthys cataractae*, and was elated when Paul Bugas at DGIF confirmed it! Dace are part of the largest family of fishes in the world, the Cyprinidae Family, which includes carp, minnows, shiners, dace and chub. Fish from this family have one dorsal fin, a pelvic fin on their abdomen, and they usually have a lateral line that is visible along the length of their body on their sides.

PICK UP READING HERE

In the case of this native longnose dace, this fish is:

- distinctly dark on the top half and light on the lower half
- in possession of a fleshy snout and the mouth is *inferior*—sort of on the bottom of their chin
- very small scaled, looking like it has no scales at all
- 2-4” long

They are a common small fish, but Virginia is the south end of their range. These dace like cool, small to medium creeks and they like fairly fast riffles that move about 2 feet per second. Their bodies are streamlined long and sleek to handle the fast water.

Longnose dace can live to about 4 years old! The male attracts a female by building a depression in the bottom gravel/sand. When the female spawns her eggs, the eggs stick to the gravel, sand and rocks and the eggs hatch in a few days. The male will guard the egg circle which is about the size of a salad plate. Dace have “high site fidelity” so they live out their lives usually in one small area of a stream.

Dace are night eaters and they eat aquatic insects like stonefly and mayfly larvae, other fishes’ scales and eggs, crustaceans, annelid worms and algae. A fine local small fish!

### **Overall Citations:**

Rohde, C., Arndt, R., Lindquist, D., and Parnell, J. (1994) *Freshwater Fishes of the Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.

United States Geological Survey (2018). *Rhinichthys Cataractae*. Retrieved 4/12/18 from <https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.aspx?speciesID=638>

Ohio Department of Natural Resources (2018). *Longnose dace*. Retrieved 4/12/18 from <http://wildlife.ohiodnr.gov/species-and-habitats/species-guide-index/fish/longnose-dace>