

Invasive fish spotted in Missouri can even be found on land. Kill it if you see one

June 12 2023, by Mike Stunson



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An invasive fish species last seen in Missouri in 2019 is now back, and there are concerns it could continue to spread throughout the state.

A northern snakehead fish was captured May 19 in Wayne County in the foothills of the Ozarks, according to the Missouri Department of Conservation. It's the second ever sighting of the fish in Missouri, with

the first being in 2019.

According to the National Invasive Species Information Center, the northern snakehead is a concern because it preys on and competes with [native species](#).

If you see one, you're advised to kill it immediately by severing its head or gutting it, Missouri officials say.

"Unfortunately, it was only a matter of time before we saw this species continue to spread in Missouri," MDC fisheries management biologist Dave Knuth said.

The northern snakehead got its name because of its snake-like appearance, officials say. It has a "long, cylindrical body" with scales on its head.

The fish is capable of breathing out of [water](#) and can be found on land, according to the New York Invasive Species Information.

"They have the ability to 'walk' [short distances](#) on land and their lung-like organ allows them to survive out of water for up to four days," the Invasive Species Centre said.

National Geographic says the fish is native to Asia and has caused [environmental problems](#) after being introduced in the United States. It was first seen in Maryland and is still most common in the Northeast, but there have been increasing sightings in Arkansas in recent years, according to a database map by the U.S. Geological Survey.

Often confused with the native bowfin, northern snakeheads have a much longer fin, Missouri officials say. They can grow to about 33 inches and are often 10 to 12 pounds.

Any sightings of the fish should be reported to Missouri Department of Conservation officials at 573-290-5858.

"This fish has a wide temperature tolerance, can spawn multiple times in one year and can survive in low-oxygenated waters by breathing air," Knuth said. "The impacts of this species on native fish populations are still to be determined and it's something we will have to follow over time."

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