

Oscar

(Astronotus ocellatus)

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INTRODUCTION

Oscar (*Astronotus ocellatus*) is a prohibited species in the Northern Territory. As such, its importation and/or possession is illegal and subject to a \$20,000.00 fine.

Oscar is not known to exist in the wild in the Northern Territory. However, it is a popular aquarium fish throughout Australia and is considered to have the potential to become a major pest of wet tropical regions of northern Australia.

DESCRIPTION

Size: Typically, oscar grows to about 200-280 mm ([Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission](#), 2003).

Colour: Young fish have wavy white and orange markings on a black background; colouration of the body and fins of adults is usually very dark, with olive blue-green and mustard colours, highlighting large dark blotches. Some have orange or red markings (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 2005; [Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission](#), 2003).

The base of the caudal fin has a large spot or ocellus bordered with red. Fin colouration varies; usually it is very dark, occasionally there are ocelli present. Eyes are red (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 2005; [Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission](#), 2003).

Also albino varieties can be found in the aquarium fish industry.

Features: All have a thick mucus coat on the body (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 2005).

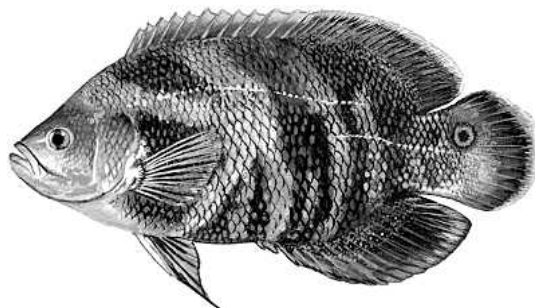


Figure 1. An oscar (Photo: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

HABITAT

Oscars are found in coastal canals, ponds, and lakes (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 2007)

Tolerance: This species does not tolerate cold waters. A lower lethal temperature of 12.9°C has been reported for specimens under experimental conditions ([Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission](#), 2003).

Diet: The natural diet of oscar includes fruit, snails, insects and small fish. Other items such as reptiles may be opportunistically eaten. It is an omnivore with carnivorous tendencies (Francalossi et al, 1998; Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, 2003).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Oscar is renowned for its aggressiveness. It may have a significant impact on native fishes through direct predation and competition for breeding areas ([Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission](#), 2003).

REPRODUCTION

Oscars mature early (10 to 12 months), have relatively high fecundity and are territorial during the breeding season (Francalossi et al., 1998).

Spawning normally takes place in still waters on flat, solid surfaces. The female typically lays about 3,000 eggs and both parents are occasionally seen guarding hundreds of young in shallow water along shorelines (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 2005).

DISTRIBUTION

Oscar is a cichlid native to the Amazon basin and has worldwide commercial value as an ornamental species. Over its native range oscar is found in the Amazon, Orinoco and La Plata River systems in South America ([Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission](#), 2003).

Wild populations of oscar are not known to exist in the Northern Territory. However, populations of this exotic fish do exist along the Central Queensland coast and it is considered to have the potential to become a major aquatic pest of wet tropical regions of northern Australia (Harrison and Congdon, 2002).

REFERENCES

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