



76. PIKE / HECHT (*Esox lucius*)

IDENTIFICATION: The northern pike has an elongated, somewhat laterally compressed body. The front of the head is flat, shaped like a duck's bill, and scaled. The duckbill jaws have large, sharp-pointed teeth, and the lower jaw extends beyond the upper one. The dorsal and anal fins are located far to the rear, close to the base of the tail fin. The caudal fin is forked. The back is dark and may be olive-green, brown-green or gray-green, shading to lighter green on the flanks and to white on the belly. The sides are covered with many bean-shaped yellow markings. The reddish-brown fins are darkly spotted. Young pike (grass pike) are uniformly light green.

HABITAT: The pike is a freshwater game fish common to most streams and lakes, but found also in brackish waters. In lakes, pike favor the shallow shoal area with plenty of water vegetation where they hide and lurk for prey. In rivers, pike favor backwaters and feeder streams. In the main stream they congregate in moderate to strong currents on the downstream side of obstacles or falls. Pike ascend streams and tributaries to the trout regions where they can greatly damage the trout stock.

FOOD: Pike prey voraciously on other fish and are known to eat other animals, including frogs, snakes, ducklings, and mice. Fish important in the pike's diet are roach, bream, minnows, and sometimes such game fish as trout, grayling, and their own young. A pike may swallow prey one-fifth its own weight and up to 70 percent its own length. It grasps the prey broadside, turns it, and swallows it head first. Pike is tasty and popular with fishermen.

SPAWNING: Pike spawn from February to May in swampy or marsh backwater areas. They do not prepare a nest or care for the eggs or the fry. The female produces 10,000 to 20,000 eggs per pound of body weight and drops them indiscriminately over weed patches to which they cling. Northern pike are one of the fastest growing fresh water fish. Pike are cannibalistic. Fast growing fish feed on slow growing ones, considerably affecting the total population.