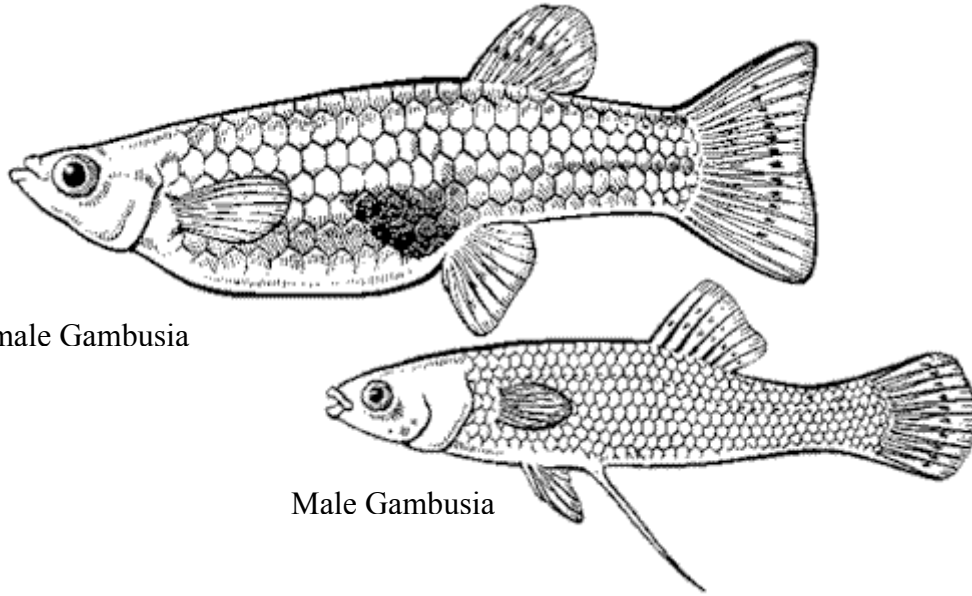


Gambusia – The Plague Minnow



Also known as: Plague Minnow, Mosquito fish, or Eastern Gambusia.

Introduction: Gambusia is a feral fish that has been introduced into Australia. They were introduced from America in the 1925 to control mosquitoes, however evidence suggests that native fish are actually much better at this than Gambusia. Gambusia now live throughout most of Australia and are partly responsible for a reduction in the number of some native fish and frog species.

Why are Gambusia bad? Gambusia are an aggressive predator. They are known to attack, kill and eat small native fish, water bugs, frog eggs and tadpoles. They compete for food with native fish, eat their eggs and attack and kill the baby fish (fry). Therefore where Gambusia live you might not find many native fish. Gambusia also eat frog eggs and attack tadpoles by nipping their tails, often killing the tadpoles. They also eat many different types of water bugs.

Gambusia can live in almost any waterbody and thrive in still or slow flowing water. When they are released into a creek or stream they can usually NEVER be removed.

Gambusia should NEVER be released into ANY waterway, including outdoor ponds or farm dams.

Breeding: Gambusia are very fast breeders. Unlike our native fish who lay eggs they give birth to live young. Breeding occurs from October to April when the water is warmer. They can breed 9 times in a year and can give birth to between 50 and 300 young at once.

Gambusia Laws: In New South Wales, Gambusia have been declared a *Key Threatening Process* under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*, because of their impact on native frogs. The National Parks and Wildlife Service have drafted a plan aimed at reducing the impact of Gambusia. It is illegal to release Gambusia into waterways in New South Wales.

Distribution: Gambusia are now found over much of Australia's mainland and there has recently been one reported finding in Tasmania. They are found throughout the Murray-Darling Basin and in most coastal catchments in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. They occur, but are not common in Western Australia or the Northern Territory.

Gambusia are often sold in pet shops as feeder fish or to put into backyard ponds and from here they are sometimes released illegally into local creeks, spreading them further.

Tolerance: Gambusia prefer warm still or slow flowing water. However they are extremely tolerant of any water conditions, and can stand temperature ranges from -4°C (water under ice) to 44°C . They prefer freshwater but can live in saltier water and are commonly found in estuaries.

Identifying Gambusia

Description: Gambusia is a small stout fish with green/olive colouration becoming grey with a bluish sheen on the sides and silver on the belly.



Male

Female (not Pregnant)

Pregnant female

Identifying features:

1. The females are larger than the males, with females growing up to 6 cm long and males up to 3 ½ cm long. They have a deep rounded belly and flattened upper surface, especially the head.
2. They have an upturned mouth and big eyes.
3. Females have a distinguishing black marking on their bellies, which gets larger when pregnant.
4. Males are more flat with a longer anal fin, which is used as its breeding tool.
5. Gambusia have one small dorsal fin.
6. The dorsal fin is behind the anal fin.
7. They school in large number on the surface of water, all swimming in different directions and can occur in large numbers.

Other native fish that can be confused with Gambusia:

- Pacific blue eyes (*Pseudomugil signifer*)
- Gudgeons, including the Firetail gudgeon (*Hypseleotris galiici*), Dwarf Flathead gudgeon (*Philypnodon sp.*) and the Southern purple spotted gudgeon (*Mogurnda adspera*)
- Australian Smelt (*Retropinna semoni*)

If you are unsure of the identity of a fish, please return it to the water.



Pacific Blue Eye



Australian Smelt



Dwarf Flathead Gudgeon



Firetail Gudgeon