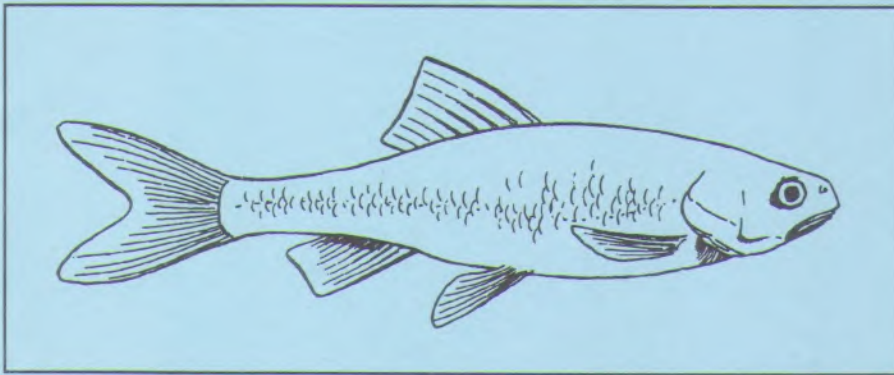




WILDLIFE NOTES



BLUNTNOSE SHINER



The Bluntnose shiner (*Notropis simus*), a member of the minnow family, once common in the Rio Grande and Pecos River, has declined significantly in number in New Mexico. These fish attain a total length of three inches or less. The bluntnose shiner is difficult to recognize.

Its mouth, which extends to a point under the pupil of the eye and is overhung by a bluntly rounded snout. The eye is about half the length of the snout. The top or dorsal fin is located midway back. The Rio Grande shiner (*N. jemezanus*) has a larger eye and more pointed snout than the bluntnose, and the dorsal fin is farther back, distinctly behind the point of attachment of the pelvic fin.

This fish is silvery with a pale greenish brown back. The silver color intensifies on the sides. A silvery scattered stripe runs along the side. The fins are whitish in color, with the tail fin having a fair amount of dark flecking—sometimes to the point of forming a small chevron or spot. This is a deep-bodied, spindle-shaped fish. Breeding males develop an abundance of small knobs on the head, breast, and pectoral fins.

In the Pecos River the bluntnose shiner occurs in most of the available habitats, from Fort Sumner to Artesia. However, the species is most common in main channel areas, with slow moving water, depths of seven to 12 inches, and a sandy bottom. There the shiner may associate with other species, including the Rio Grande, sand, and red shiners (*N. jemezanus*, *N. stramineus*, and *Cyprinella lutrensis*, respectively). The bluntnose shiner eats plants and animal matter, with small flies, zooplankton, and aquatic plants comprising the bulk of the diet.

This species appears to have an extended spawning season, although reproductive success may be dependent on high flows, as significant hatches of fry have been documented in the Pecos River in such years. Bluntnose shiners may live up to three years.

The subspecies of bluntnose shiner native to the Rio Grande is believed to be extinct, as the last documented record of that subspecies was in 1964 near Peña Blanca (Sandoval County), New Mexico. Furthermore, a survey in 1986-1987 failed to reveal its presence in the state. The Pecos

subspecies has also declined significantly, and it appears to be extirpated in the Pecos River upstream of Fort Sumner. The major cause for the decline is probably the periodic dewatering of its habitat from diversions, dams and drought. Dams probably change flow, temperature and other stream characteristics. Harvest as a bait fish and kills due to pollution have probably also contributed to the decline of this fish.

Perennial stream flows and other habitat needs are essential to the conservation of this species. Prevention of pollution (including from agricultural, industrial and municipal sources) is also needed, and restrictions on taking bait fish should continue. Monitoring of the Pecos population needs to be continued on a regular and systematic basis to enable management agencies to respond immediately to protect the species should its numbers decline or its habitat suffer from cultural disturbances.

Published 1993

