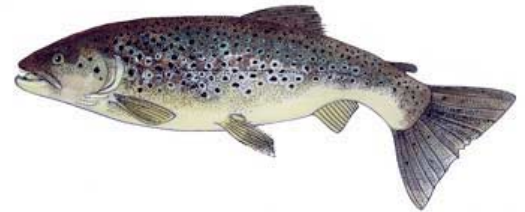


RIVER FISH

Ireland contains hundreds of rivers, ranging from small mountain streams to big broad rivers such as the Shannon, which is the largest river in Ireland and Britain. These rivers often begin high up in the mountains, from where they start their journey to the sea. Most of them contain a large population of fish of different species. These fish vary in shapes, sizes and colours and often live in different habitats within the river. It is important to protect and conserve Ireland's fish stocks, as they are a valuable natural resource. Fish are badly affected by pollution, and often the first sign that a river is polluted is when the fish begin to die. This fact helps us to monitor the rivers for water quality and to help ensure a cleaner environment. Apart from this, fishing provides an enjoyable hobby for thousands of anglers throughout the country.

Brown Trout *Salmo trutta* Breac Donn

The Brown Trout is one of Ireland's oldest and most widespread fish. It can inhabit all types of river systems, from small streams to the largest of our rivers. The trout loves fresh clean water that has plenty of oxygen and it is particularly affected by pollution. The trout has a brown body and is covered in black and red spots, which help to camouflage it against the stony riverbed. Trout will feed on just about anything, but they can often be seen rising to the surface to sip in flies that have been trapped in the surface of the river. You can tell that trout are feeding when you see a series of rings in the water which are caused by the trout sipping the flies down.



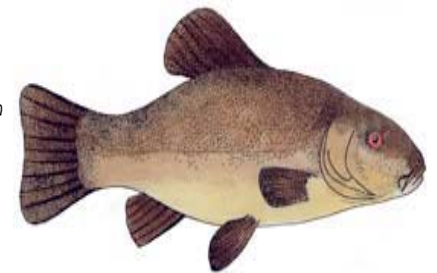
Salmon *Salmo salar* Bradán

The Salmon is one of Ireland's most famous fish because of the long and dangerous journey it takes during its lifetime. Salmon are born in small streams, high up in the river system. They spend their early life in these small streams feeding on tiny insects. Then, the small salmon suddenly feel the urge to travel to the sea and they begin a journey (sometimes hundreds of miles) down through the river to the sea. Many salmon are killed by predators on this journey, but those that survive will live and feed in the sea for a year or more. At sea they become silver in colour and can grow very large. Then, after some time, the salmon again feel an urge, this time to return to the river from which they were born. The salmon are able to remember the exact stream from which they came, and they travel back to that stream to lay their eggs and begin the cycle all over again.



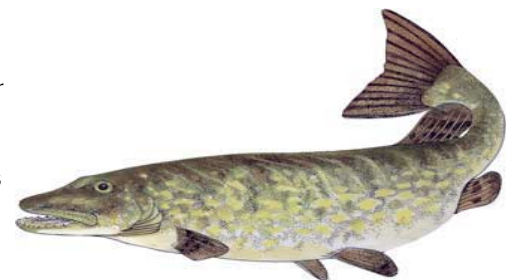
Tench *Tinca tinca* Cúramán

Tench, as with many fish in Ireland, were introduced by monks hundreds of years ago. The monks kept them in ponds and lakes where they reared them as a source of food. Now, tench have become widespread in Ireland and can be found in many of our larger rivers. Tench have a beautiful olive green colour and they are covered in a thick coating of slimy mucous, which protects them from disease. In ancient times this mucous was often used in remedies to treat human illness! The tench feeds by sucking insects up from areas of muddy bottom in rivers. Its mouth is down turned to make this job easier, and it has 'barbules' on either side of its mouth so it can feel its way around the bottom.



Pike *Esox lucius* Gailliasc

The pike is Ireland's most fearsome predator fish. It lives through eating other smaller fish and it has a huge mouth filled with rows of razor sharp teeth. Once it seizes another fish, there is little chance of escape, as the teeth point backwards down into the pike's mouth. The pike loves to wait in ambush for its prey and its green colour is perfect for hiding in weeds waiting for other fish to pass. The pike's long strong and slim body is perfect for bursts of speed over short distances, as it shoots out from its lair to engulf its prey. The pike normally likes the larger, slower moving areas of the river.



Text: Shane O'Reilly, Central Fisheries Board / Sketches © Central Fisheries Board

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