

Unique Fish of Bear Lake

Bear Lake is estimated to be over 28,000 years old. For at least 8,000 years, the lake was permanently isolated from the Bear River by earthquake activity. This isolation resulted in unique water chemistry and the evolution of five species of fish that are found nowhere else in the world.

BEAR LAKE CUTTHROAT TROUT- The only trout native to Bear Lake evolved as a predator in a large lake system. It was originally called a “Bluenose” because of the brilliant azure, blue coloration of the head during the winter, but typically it is silvery with a few black spots and faint red slashes under the lower jaw. They spawn in the streams during the springs, but spend the majority of their life in the lake. The Bear Lake cutthroat feed primarily on Bonneville Cisco, Bear Lake Sculpin, and insects on the lake surface. They are most catchable during the winter and may live ten years and grow to 15 pounds.



BONNEVILLE CISCO – This fish is a long, slender, pearly silver, thin fish. It rarely grows beyond nine inches. It has a dusky blue back and a band along its flanks at spawning time. The snout is sharply pointed. It is noted for its mid winter spawning along the rocky beach on the east side of Bear Lake in mid January where it is found in large numbers. It is a prolific fish that is an important forage for the predatory species in Bear Lake.



BEAR LAKE WHITEFISH AND BONNEVILLE WHITE FISH – These fish are indistinguishable beyond 10 inches in length. The Bonneville whitefish have gray-blue spots along their sides until they reach that size. These whitefish are elongated, relatively cylindrical fish. They are silvery white along their sides blending into a charcoal gray to black on their backs. They are easy to catch in the winter because they feed on Bonneville Cisco eggs. They may reach four pounds in weight and grow to 20 inches long. Both species are found only in Bear Lake and nowhere else in the world.



BEAR LAKE SCULPIN – This fish is rarely seen except in the stomachs of large fish. It is active during the night and spends the rest of the time under rocks or burrowed into the bottom with only its blue eyes exposed. It is probably the second most abundant fish in the lake and rarely exceeds 5 inches. It spawns between April and July by attaching small egg masses to the bottom of rocks where the male guards them until they hatch. Bear Lake Sculpin are distributed throughout the lake and are an important food item for other fish.

