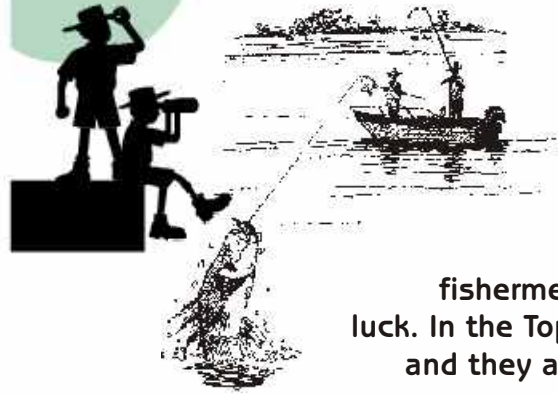


# NT Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

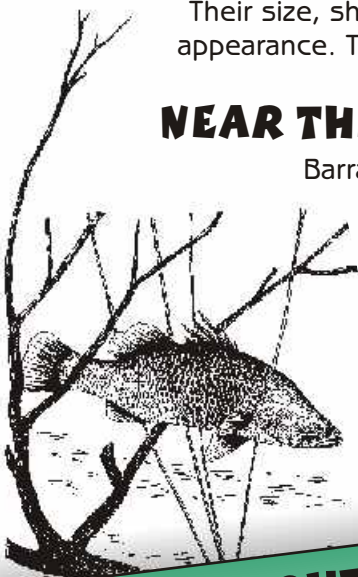


## BARRAMUNDI

The Barramundi, *Lates calcarifer* is famous for its spectacular fighting ability when hooked on a fishing line and as a fantastic eating fish that is served by restaurants worldwide. Their reputation has attracted thousands of recreational fishermen from all over the world to the Northern Territory to try their luck. In the Top End, barra live very close to people, and they are sometimes even kept as pets!

### A BIG FISH IN A BIG POND

Barramundi can grow to a large size (150 cm), and weigh over 40 kg. There are much larger ones recorded though, but they are uncommon. Barra are silvery coloured with large reflective scales and a broad fan-tail. Their size, shape and colour give them a spectacular appearance. They live in both salt and freshwater habitats.



### NEAR THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN

Barra are mighty hunters! They are an ambush predator, waiting for their prey to come to them before striking at lightening speed. What they actually do is create a powerful sucking action with their bucket-like mouth drawing in water and unwary prey from over 20cm away.

Barra will eat almost anything in the water as long as it fits in their mouth. As babies (fingerlings), they eat plankton (microscopic plants & animals). As they grow they eat larger things like insects, crustaceans (such as prawns - a real favourite), frogs and other fish including other Barramundi. They have even been known to eat baby crocodiles! In turn, they are on the menu for birds like Black-necked Storks (Jabirus), Kingfishers, White-bellied Sea Eagles, as well as crocodiles and file snakes.

### SEEING WITHOUT EYES

A special sensory organ called the lateral line allows the Barramundi to hunt in the murky waters of mangrove forests. It detects vibrations made by prey.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Barramundi have growth rings like those on tree trunks. They are found in bony things in the head called otoliths. Each ring means one year of life. Barramundi can live for up to 20 years, but older barramundi are not good to eat, as their meat is tough and flavourless.

### MANGROVES AND BARRAMUNDI

Mangroves are essential in the lifecycle of the Barramundi. During the high tide they provide a sheltered environment for mating and as a nursery. When the eggs hatch, the babies get a head start from all the readily available food. In this nutrient rich habitat.

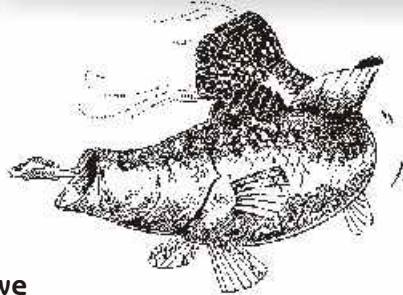
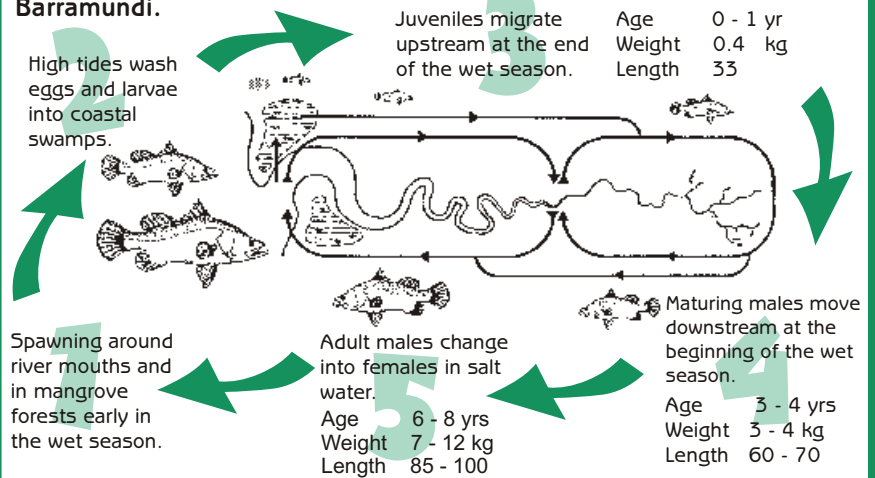
## BORN A MAN AND .... NOW A LADY!

Barramundi breed during the wet season (Oct-May) in the salty water around river mouths. All fingerlings are born as males. When they return to salt water at around 6 to 8 years old, they become female! Scientists believe that the secret trigger for changing sex has something to do with salty water.

### DID YOU KNOW?

A female can produce 32 million eggs in one season. That's a lot of brothers!

This illustration shows the life cycle and migration pattern of the Barramundi.



## SEEING A BARRAMUNDI UP CLOSE

Barramundi live quite close to urban areas of the Top End, especially Darwin and Gove. With keen eyes, they can be spotted from places like Darwin's Stokes Hill Wharf at night. To try this, look for their eye shine with a torch. In daylight, they can be seen in the waters of mangrove forests and in shallow freshwater streams. You can snorkel with them at Howard Springs Nature Park, and feed them at Aquascene at Doctors Gully. In Mataranka, the Territory Manor has a Barramundi feeding display. At the Territory Wildlife Park the Barramundi swim over you as you walk through a glass tunnel in a giant aquarium. It doesn't get much better than that.

## PUZZLE TIME

You too can help save the Barramundi! If we all do this together, Barramundi will be here for ever. Use the code to reveal the missing words.

Barramundi are great to catch but we should all consider the important role they play in their natural habitat. When fishing a person may

have     barra in their  
B1 B4 E2 A5

possession, at any one time. Except in the Mary River area where the limit is only

per person.  
D5 E3 C5

The Barramundi you have are not allowed to be under

-      
B1 B4 B1 D5 E5 B1 B4 E2 A5

centimetres. This is because Barramundi under this size are males. Without them Barramundi would not be able to mate!



Want to learn more about Barramundi?

Check out the affordable field guide *Field Guide to the Freshwater Fishes of Australia* by G. Allen, S. Midgley & M. Allen.

	1	2	3	4	5
A	A	B	C	D	E
B	F	G	H	I	J
C	K	L	M	N	O
D	P	Q	R	S	T
E	U	V	W	X	Y