ROUND GOBY (*Apollonia melanostomus*)

Oneida Lake Status: Absent

Round goby resting on a bed of mussels

Front view of the invasive round goby

Round goby held by a researcher

- Invaders in the Great Lakes region
- Aggressive and opportunistic predator
- Associated with outbreaks of botulism

The round goby is a bottom-dwelling, freshwater fish native to central Eurasia. They are small, averaging 3-5 inches in length. Juveniles are grey with a distinctive black spot on the front dorsal fin. As fish mature, they develop gray, black, brown, and olive green markings over their bodies. The eyes protrude slightly from the head, and individuals have a distinctive suction disk on their pelvic fins.

Round goby head close-up

Round gobies feed nocturnally on mollusks, crustaceans, worms, eggs, small fish, and insect larvae. They have an aggressive feeding behavior that reduces the food available to other fish, and their ability to survive in degraded conditions increases the competitive advantage with native species. In areas where the round goby has become established, populations of native aquatic life often decline.

As nest predators, round gobies threaten smallmouth bass. The round goby rarely enters guarded nests, but when anglers catch a guardian bass, round gobies will consume eggs until the parent bass returns. In an unguarded nest, round gobies consume all smallmouth bass eggs in just 15 minutes. Round gobies do not prey on free-swimming larvae or juvenile fish.

The round goby was probably introduced as a stowaway on ocean-going ships, and it was first discovered in the St. Clair River in 1990. They have been found in the Oswego River system, and at the last lock of the dam, but have not yet been identified alive in Oneida Lake. Round gobies are a known carrier of type E botulism, and they may increase the bioaccumulation of toxins in fish such as smallmouth bass and walleye.

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