



## Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

### Slimy Sculpin *Cottus cognatus*

State Status: **None**  
Federal Status: **None**

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** The Slimy Sculpin has a broad head, tapering body, large fanlike pectoral fins, a hooked preopercular spine, no scales, pelvic fins positioned under the anterior base of the pectoral fins, and soft, flexible fin spines. This species is mottled brown to gray dorsally with saddle-shaped blotches that sometimes extend onto the upper sides. Breeding males are darker, almost black above, with a bright orange border on their first dorsal fin. This is the only sculpin found in Massachusetts freshwaters. (Another small sculpin, the Grubby, *Myoxocephalus aeneus*, is common in local marine waters, but never enters freshwater habitats.) The Slimy Sculpin is a relatively small fish; most adults are about 3 inches long. Exceptional specimens may exceed 4.5 inches. Slimy Sculpin feed primarily on bottom-dwelling invertebrates, particularly aquatic insect larvae and nymphs. Small crustaceans, fishes, and aquatic vegetation are consumed in lesser amounts.

were taken from the lower Merrimack near Lawrence, but this population has apparently been extirpated.

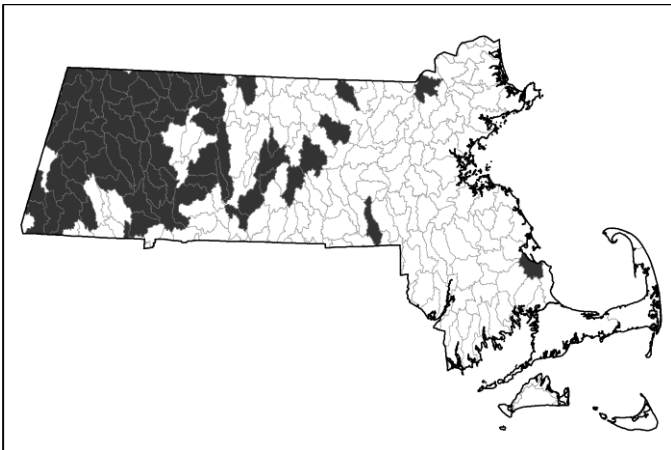
**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** In Massachusetts, Slimy Sculpin are known only from high-gradient, rocky, clear, cold streams. In other parts of their range, they also inhabit cold-water lakes and low-gradient, spring-fed streams. In streams, Slimy Sculpin inhabit riffles and tend to stay close to the bottom, generally hidden in the stony substrate.

**THREATS:** The continued presence of Slimy Sculpin in eastern Massachusetts depends on the protection of habitat adjoining hill-streams. Changes in water quality, probably due to acid rain, have impacted a number of Slimy Sculpin populations, and activities which increase turbidity or temperature are likely to impact this species.

#### REFERENCE:

This species description was adapted, with permission, from:

Karsten E. Hartel, David B. Halliwell, and Alan E. Launer.  
2002. *Inland Fishes of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts.



Data from DFW Fisheries Surveys and Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** In Massachusetts, Slimy Sculpin are common and widely distributed in suitable habitats west of the Connecticut River. East of the Connecticut River, there are small, geographically isolated populations in the Millers, Chicopee, and Nashua river basins. In 1861, specimens

Updated 2015

*A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan*

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

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