Oreochromis niloticus (Linnaeus 1758)
Nile Tilapia

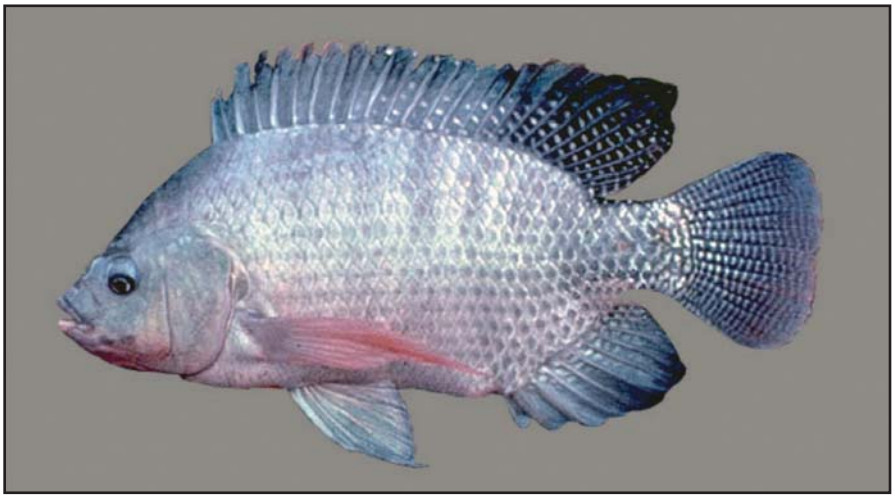

Photo by Department of Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures, Auburn University

Identification: The Nile Tilapia closely resembles the Blue Tilapia, *Oreochromis aureus*, but can generally be distinguished by its strongly-barred caudal fin. Trewavas (1983) provided distinguishing characteristics with a key and a discussion of hybrids. In the U.S.A. and other regions where they have been introduced, hybrid tilapias have been used in aquaculture and subsequently escaped into freshwater and estuarine water bodies. In the wild, reproductively viable hybrids have likely back-crossed or further crossed with other hybrids, and therefore identification to species for most tilapia populations in the U.S.A. is difficult (Costa-Pierce 2003). Maximum size is approximately 60 cm SL.

Native Range: Tropical and subtropical Africa as well as the Middle East (Trewavas 1983).

Similar Species: No tilapias are native to Florida and no native species are similar to tilapias.

Ecology: Nile Tilapia is a hardy species, capable of withstanding a variety of environmental conditions (low oxygen, salinity), and is consequently one of the most common species in aquaculture. Females can reproduce as early as a size of 10 cm TL (an age of approximately 50 days). Reproduction is similar to *O. mossambicus* and females can brood up to 2,000 eggs in their mouth. The species is a substrate feeder, consuming cladocerans, copepods, chironomids, and filamentous algae. From Boschung and Mayden (2004) and Peterson et al. (2006).

Nonindigenous Occurrences: There are spotty occurrences of Nile Tilapia throughout the U.S.A. In Florida it is only known to be established in one locality (Orange Lake, Alachua County). The species has been captured in brackish water at Crane Creek near Melbourne and in a pond in the Kissimmee drainage. Shafland et al. (2008) provides details of other Florida occurrences and taxonomic difficulties associated with this species. The Nile Tilapia occurs primarily in inland (freshwater) habitats; however, like many cichlid fishes it can tolerate salinity and can occasionally be found in estuarine habitats. For example, an estuarine population has persisted in southern Mississippi for several years (Peterson et al. 2004 and 2005; Schofield et al. 2007).