

# BURBOT

*Lota lota*



Most people on seeing a burbot for the first time believe it to be an eel. The long narrow dorsal and anal fins, small round tail, and supple body make it appear eel-like. The head is quite flat and there is a single barbel under the chin. Very small, smooth scales give the impression of a scaleless, slippery fish. The overall appearance, and its writhing action when caught, give the burbot a poor image.

This is unfortunate, for burbot are a freshwater member of the cod family and have white, flaky meat of good quality. Baked or fried, burbot surprise many anglers who have previously turned up their noses. Even more so when the meat is smoked; it acquires a new flavour and the taste and texture are superb. The exceptionally large liver of the burbot is another taste treat. It can weigh over 1 kg and when smoked is rich, nutritious, and tasty.

They prefer water temperatures below 19°C and therefore are found mainly in larger, deeper waters. They eat aquatic insects and crayfish, and as they become larger other fish become important in their diet.

In early winter, when water temperatures are around 1°C, burbot move to their spawning grounds. Balls of 10 to 12 fish, intertwined and constantly moving, roll across the bottom and deposit their eggs on gravel bars or rocky shoals. It is at this time of year that they are readily caught. The eggs hatch in spring when the water temperature warms to a chilly 6°C.

Although angling records have not long been kept for burbot, one weighing 8.2 kg was caught in Lake Manitoba in 1989. The average size would be just over 1 kg.

warm water species