



Powhatan Lakes 2022



NOTICE TO USERS: In 2018, the spillways of both lakes experienced considerable damage from excessive storm events. To prevent further damage, both lakes are being operated 3 to 4 feet below full-pool until funding can be secured and repairs can be completed. Boaters should be aware that trailered boats may be difficult to launch at the lowers lake levels. Follow the Powhatan Lakes page on our website for any updates regarding the repairs and water levels (<https://dwr.virginia.gov/waterbody/powhatan-lakes/>).

Nestled in the northeastern corner of the Powhatan Wildlife Management Area, the Powhatan Lakes are long-time angler attractions of Powhatan County. The lakes, between 34 and 40 acres, are contiguous impoundments of Stegers Creek. In June of 2004, a severe storm event caused breaching of both dams. The lakes were reopened in April of 2008 with some major improvements to the facility including the construction of two new fishing piers, upgrades to the boat launches, and new wildlife viewing trails. Before 2004, the lakes were well known for their quality Largemouth Bass, sunfish, and crappie fisheries. When the lakes refilled these species reestablished population from fish residing in Stegers Creek. Additionally, F1 hybrid Largemouth Bass (Florida Strain Female x Northern Strain Male), Bluegill, Redear, and Channel Catfish were stocked. In 2021, the fish communities of the Powhatan Lakes were sampled by boat electrofishing and trapnets. This report summarizes the results of these surveys and what anglers can expect to catch in the lakes.

The fish communities of both lakes are diverse (Tables 1 and 2), with Largemouth Bass being the most popular fish among anglers. In both lakes, Largemouth Bass are managed under a 14-22 protective slot limit, with the additional harvest restriction of only one bass greater than 22 inches per day per angler. The bass populations in both lakes are exceptional with approximately fifty five percent of adult bass (≥ 8 inches) collected from both lakes in the protective slot range of 14-22 inches (Figure 1). The slot fish are very plump and healthy and biologists have already collected a bass that was over 24 inches and weighed in excess of 9 pounds. The exceptional bass fishery was quantified in the lower lake during a 2017 Largemouth Bass density study when the lower lake was estimated to hold 183 bass 15 inches or larger (5/acre) and 23 bass 20 inches or larger (1/acre). The bass reproduction is starting to pick up and some of the smaller fish are experiencing slower growth than the first few generations. Anglers should concentrate bass harvest on the small bass (<14 inches) to prevent future stunting of bass. The abundance of quality bass should provide a rewarding trip for any angler. The largest bass collected in 2021 was from the upper lake, measuring 23 inches and weighing 7.2 pounds.

The panfish fisheries in both lakes are primarily composed of Bluegill and Redear Sunfish. Panfish, especially Bluegill, are abundant in both lakes and fish in excess of 10 inches have been collected. The majority (92%) of panfish were small measuring less than 9 inches (Figure 2). Anglers looking for larger fish will have limited success but the abundance of fish should give excitement to even novice anglers. The fishing piers have sunken Christmas trees

around the bases that make excellent holding and fishing locations for Bluegill and Redear Sunfish.

The Powhatan Lakes offer good numbers of crappie for anglers, but the size of the fish are slightly less than ideal. Crappie catch rates were high in both lakes with all the crappie catch composed of Black Crappie. The majority of the crappie collected were between 7 and 11 inches (Figure 3). A percentage of these crappie (~ 20% in both lakes) were from the 2008 year class (age 13) and these fish experienced very slow growth levelling off around 9.5 inches (Figure 4). Younger fish are growing at a greater rate reaching 9.5 inches between 3 and 4 years. The older fish are decreasing in numbers due to natural and angling mortality, and a reduction in the number will continue to help increase growth of the remaining fish and create better crappie fisheries.

Both lakes also offer limited fisheries for Chain Pickerel and bullhead catfish. Channel Catfish are stocked annually to add additional fishing opportunities for anglers. Only twelve Channel Catfish were collected during the 2021 surveys but low catch rates are expected due to low sampling effectiveness for catfish with electrofishing and trapnet gears. Channel catfish ranged in size from 12 to 22 inches (average 17 inches).

The Powhatan Lakes are in close proximity to the Richmond area (< 1 hour drive) and offer great angling opportunities to citizens of Central Virginia. The lakes offer many amenities listed above and both lakes provide many of the historical fisheries that anglers enjoyed before the dams failed. Each lake offers well maintained concrete launches for trolling motor only boat access. Come out and enjoy the Powhatan Lakes and also take time to enjoy the rest of the Wildlife Management Area.

For more information on the Powhatan Lakes, please contact:

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Table 1. Species account and catch rates for fish collected throughout the upper Powhatan Lake in 2021.

Species	Electrofishing			Trapnets		
	Number Collected	Catch Rate (fish/hour electrofishing)	Percentage of Catch	Number Collected	Catch Rate (fish/net night)	Percentage of Catch
American Eel	9	11	3	None Collected		
Black Crappie	39	50	14	137	7	50
Bluegill	134	170	46	54	3	20
Brown Bullhead	None Collected			33	2	12
Channel Catfish	5	6	2	1	0.1	0.3
Chain Pickerel	1	1	1	5	0.3	2
Creek Chubsucker	None Collected			4	0.2	1
Flier	None Collected			2	0.1	0.8
Golden Shiner	None Collected			1	0.1	0.3
Largemouth Bass	64	81	22	1	0.1	0.3
Redear Sunfish	30	38	10	33	2	12
Warmouth	5	6	2	4	0.2	1
Yellow Bullhead	None Collected			1	0.1	0.3

Table 2. Species account and catch rates for fish collected throughout the lower Powhatan Lake in 2021.

Species	Electrofishing			Trapnets		
	Number Collected	Catch Rate (fish/hour electrofishing)	Percentage of Catch	Number Collected	Catch Rate (fish/net night)	Percentage of Catch
American Eel	3	3	2	None Collected		
Black Crappie	4	4	3	105	7.0	36
Bluegill	53	60	38	61	4.1	21
Brown Bullhead	None Collected			6	0.4	2
Channel Catfish	1	1	1	2	0.1	1
Largemouth Bass	55	62	40	None Collected		
Redear Sunfish	21	24	15	107	7.1	37
Warmouth	None Collected			5	0.3	2
Yellow Bullhead	None Collected			3	0.2	1

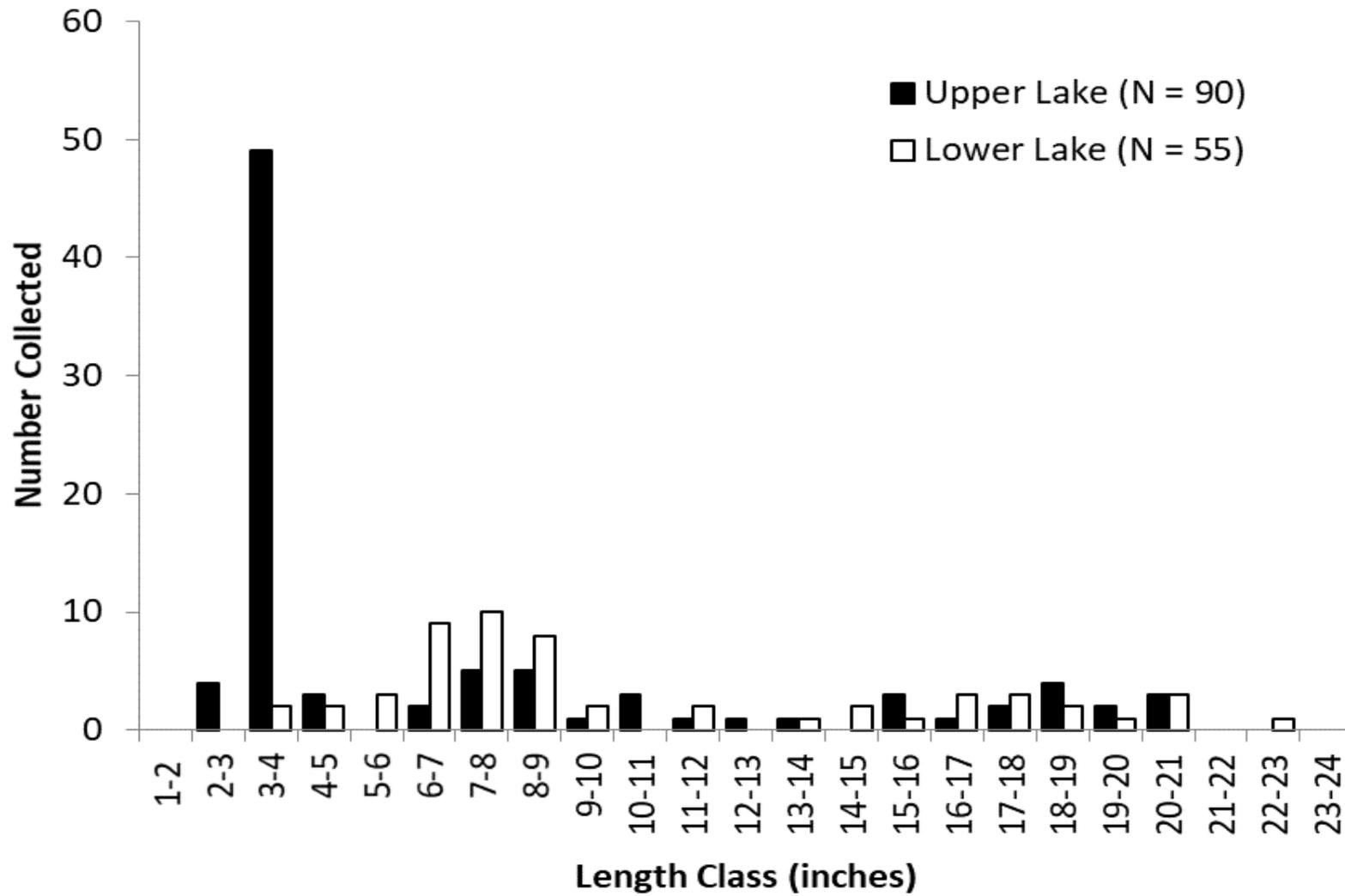


Figure 1. Length distribution of Largemouth Bass collected with electrofishing gear throughout the Powhatan Lakes in 2021.

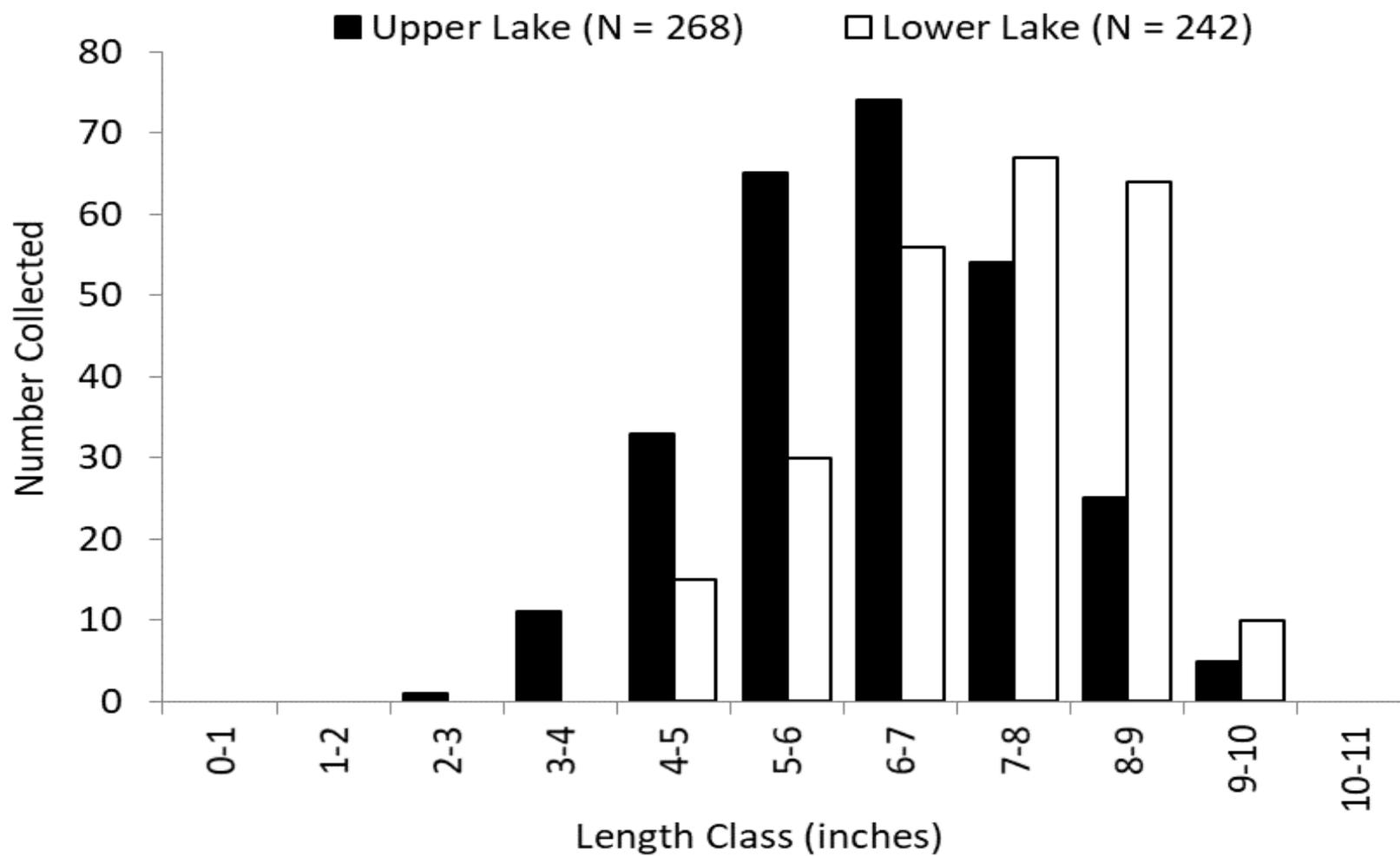


Figure 2. Length distribution of Panfish (Bluegill and Redear) collected throughout the Powhatan Lakes in 2021.

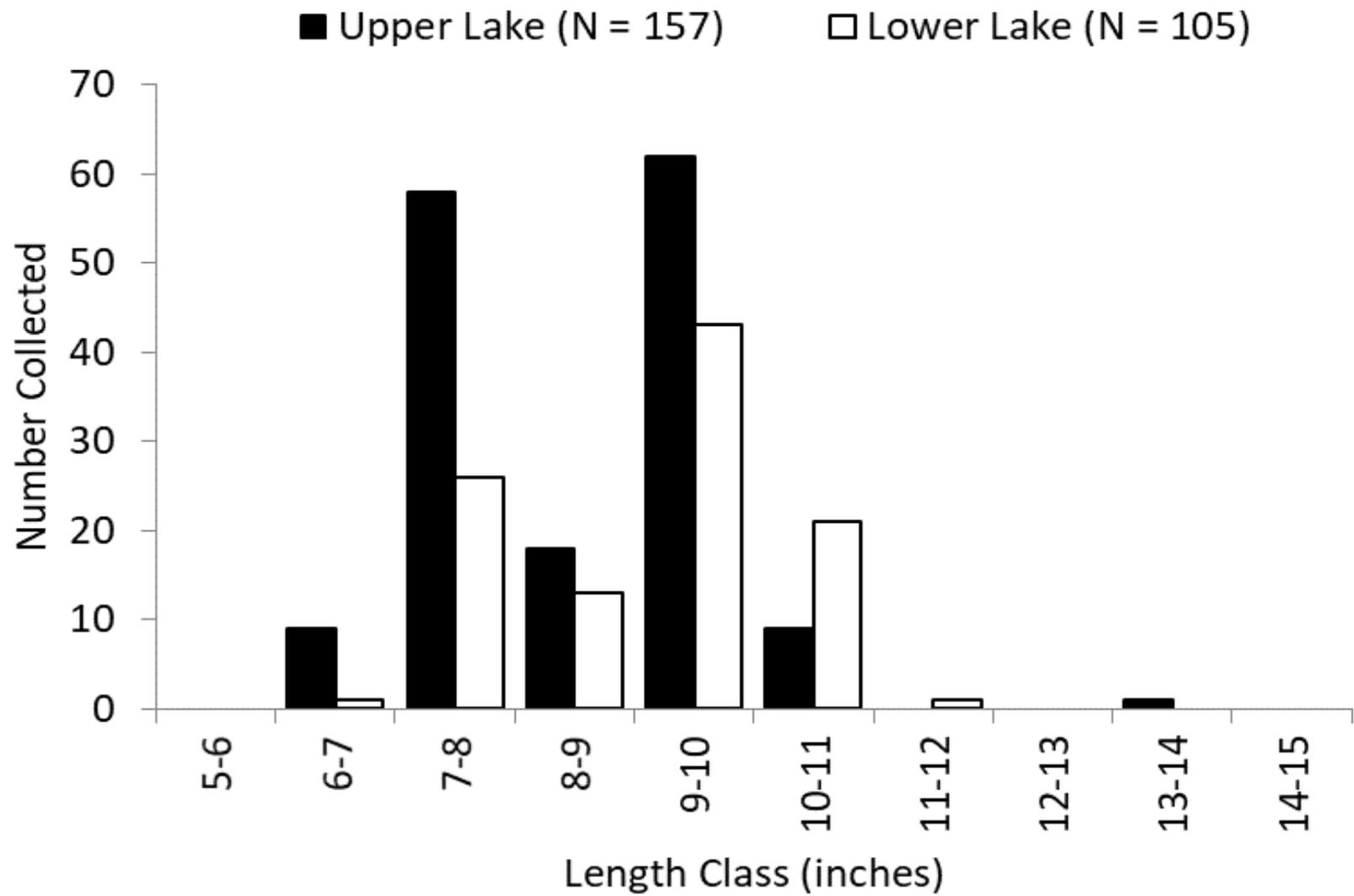


Figure 3. Length distribution of Black Crappie collected with trapnet gear throughout the Powhatan Lakes in 2021.

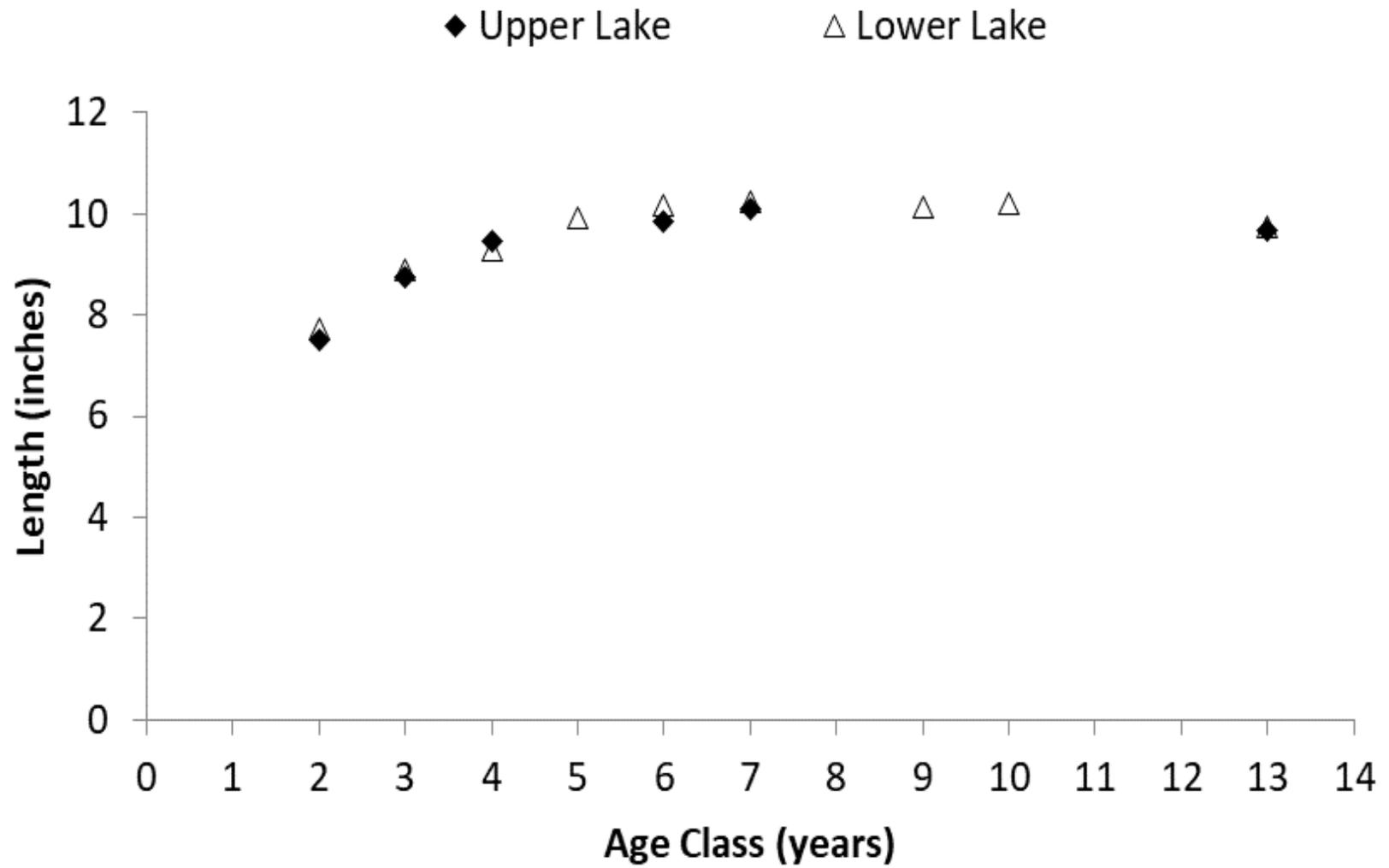


Figure 4. Average length-at-age of Black Crappie collected throughout the Powhatan Lakes in 2021.