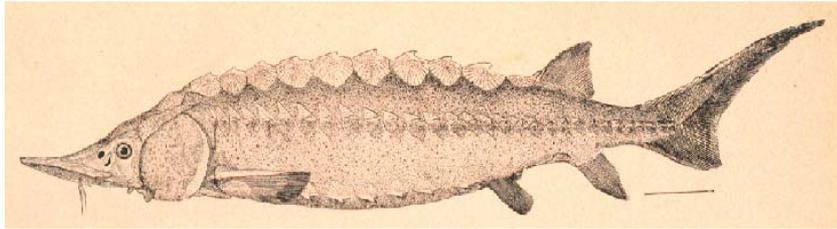
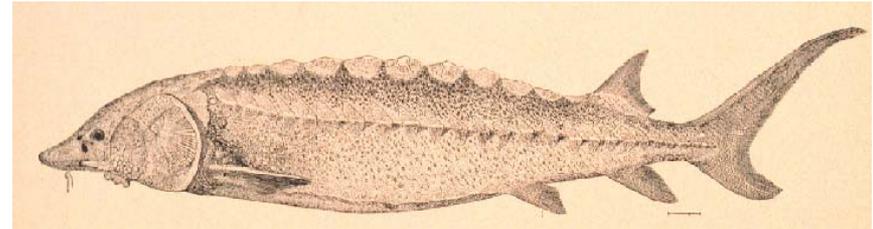


Atlantic and Shortnose Sturgeon in the Merrimack River



Atlantic sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus*)

- Coast-wide moratorium on harvest and possession
- No longer spawn in the Merrimack River, although juveniles from other river systems use the estuary as a summer foraging area
- Length – larger than shortnose, can reach lengths up to 14 feet
- Weight – up to 800 pounds
- Anadromous species, resides primarily in marine and estuarine waters and returns to freshwater to spawn
- Mature at approximately 20 years of age
- Males spawn every 1-5 years, females every 2-5 years



Shortnose sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*)

- Federally endangered
- Less than 100 adults remain in the Merrimack River
- Length – smaller than Atlantic sturgeon average approximately 3 ½ feet
- Weight – up to 50 pounds
- Spawn in freshwater in Haverhill and use the estuary in Newburyport for foraging (e.g., freshwater amphidromous)
- Mature at approximately 10-15 years of age
- Males spawn every 1-3 years, females every 3-5 years

Common to both fishes:

- Distinguished from other fish by five rows of bony plates, called “scutes,” that extend from the head to the base of the tail
- Prominent whisker-like “barbels” near the mouth that are used to find prey
- Eat a wide variety of bottom (benthic) organisms such as crustaceans, worms, and bivalves

What can you do to help sturgeon?

- While in the river, go slow - while both species are typically found near the bottom, they are known to make migrations into surface waters. This makes them vulnerable to boat strikes while on the surface.
- If you catch a sturgeon, immediately return it to the water and report the catch to NOAA Fisheries Service at – (978) 281-9300.
- Always be respectful of the environment and don't pollute.

Interesting facts:

- Both species have been known to leap completely out of the water, occasionally landing on boat decks and docks.
- A single female may produce over 2 million eggs each time she spawns.
- Both species are long-lived, with females living over 60 years and males approximately 30 years.
- Research into the biology, habitat requirements and stock status of both species continues, with the goal of restoring both to sustainable levels of abundance.



For more information on both species, please visit http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/esp/.