

SPECIES OF CONCERN

ATLANTIC STURGEON

Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus



Photo: Atlantic Sturgeon
Credit: University of Maine

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Size Atlantic sturgeon can reach lengths up to 14 feet.

Distinguishing Characteristics Large size, small mouth, presence of bony scutes between the anal fin base and the later scute row, a double row of dorsal scutes behind the dorsal fin and before the anal fin, and the presence of a pale intestine. They are bluish black or olive brown dorsally with paler sides and a white ventral surface. They have five major rows of dermal scutes.

HABITAT & BEHAVIOR

Habitat They are anadromous, remaining primarily in coastal and estuarine waters during much of the year and entering rivers in the spring to spawn. Adults generally spawn over hard, complex bottoms (e.g., cobble and gravel) and, initially, young seek out the interstitial spaces for cover from predators. Sub-adults are often found in estuarine reaches, particularly during the summer, and are presumably there to forage.

Behavior Spawning adults migrate upriver in spring. In some areas, a small spawning migration may also occur in the fall. They forage on benthic invertebrates such as mussels, worms and shrimp.

STATUS

Areas of Concern Western Atlantic - Labrador, Canada through St. John's River, Florida

Factors for Decline Bycatch, estuarine & freshwater habitat degradation, ship strikes, locks, dams

Conservation Designation IUCN: near threatened; CITES: Appendix II; American Fisheries Society: Endangered in all stream systems except Conservation Dependent in the Hudson, Delaware & Altamaha Rivers.

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LIFE HISTORY

Atlantic sturgeon can live for up to 60 years. Sexual maturity varies by location, but is reached between 5 and 34 years old. The average age at which 50% of maximum lifetime egg production is achieved is estimated to be 29 years old. Males spawn every 1 to 5 years, while females spawn every 2 to 5 years.

STATUS OF HUMAN INTERACTIONS

In 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission instituted a coast-wide moratorium on the harvest of Atlantic Sturgeon which will remain in effect until there are at least 20 protected year classes in each spawning stock. Other organizations involved with Atlantic sturgeon conservation include, but are not limited to, NOAA, state and local government agencies, private organizations and conservation organizations including the Hudson River Foundation. Cultured Atlantic sturgeon continue to be commercially valuable for both flesh and eggs.

For additional information, please contact NOAA Fisheries Service at (978) 281.9300 or visit us online at http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/CandidateSpeciesProgram/index.html.