Did You Know . . . .

. . . North Carolina has six species of shad and herring? They are the American shad, hickory shad, blueback herring, alewife, threadfin shad and gizzard shad.

. . . hickory and American shad ascend the Roanoke, Chowan, Meherrin, Tar, Neuse and Cape Fear rivers each spring? These migrations are called “shad runs” and may cover hundreds of miles to the headwaters of these rivers.

. . . the American shad (often called white shad) is the largest member of the shad and herring family? The state record taken from the Tar River in 1974 weighed nearly 8 pounds.

. . . the harvest of alewife and blueback herring from North Carolina’s coastal rivers is prohibited? The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is working with the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries to restore once thriving river herring stocks. Regulations for harvesting and possessing herring are on the Commission’s Web site (see below) and on the Divison of Marine Fisheries’ Web site, www.ncdmf.net.

For More Information

For information on fishing in public, inland waters, visit www.ncwildlife.org or call the agency’s Division of Inland Fisheries, 919-707-0220.

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Herring and Shad in North Carolina

Division of Inland Fisheries
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission
www.ncwildlife.org

Conserving Herring & Shad Populations

Blueback herring, alewife, hickory and American shad are members of the herring family (Clupeidae). They are *anadromous* fishes, which means they spend the majority of their adult lives at sea and migrate up coastal rivers in the spring to spawn in freshwater.

At one time, these coastal rivers supported thriving herring and shad industries, with millions of fish harvested each year. However, populations of these fishes declined dramatically in the last century due to dam constructions, overharvesting and other factors.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is helping to restore dwindling stocks of American shad on the Roanoke River. Each year, the Commission, along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, stocks the river with as many as 4 million American shad fry.

In addition, the Commission has enacted two regulations to help struggling stocks recover.

The first rule, effective July 2006, prohibits the taking and possession of blueback herring and alewife longer than 6 inches from the inland waters under the Commission’s jurisdiction in all coastal rivers and their tributaries up to the first impoundments of the main rivers. This protects spawning adults, which are typically longer than 6 inches; smaller herring, shorter than 6 inches and used as bait, are usually caught with cast nets in reservoirs above dams.

The second rule, which took effect July 1, 2008, decreases the daily creel limit of American shad from 10 fish to one fish per angler on the Roanoke River. This regulation will conserve the migratory American shad spawning stock during restoration efforts while allowing some harvest.

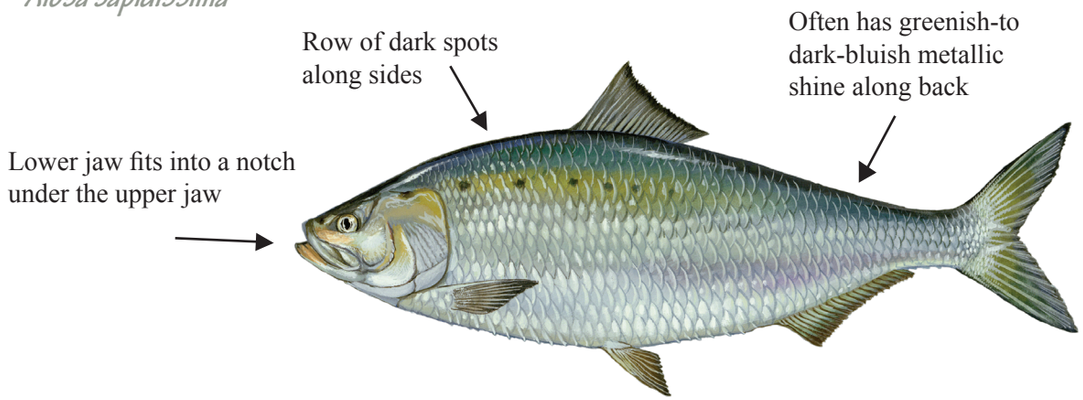
Because these four species can appear similar, particularly as juveniles, the Wildlife Resources Commission developed this pamphlet to help anglers identify the fish they catch.

Conserving herring and shad populations today ensures that we have fish for tomorrow. And it might very well result in a boom in the fisheries just as striped bass conservation in the 1990s led to the striped bass boom in North Carolina’s rivers today.

Herring and Shad Identification Tips

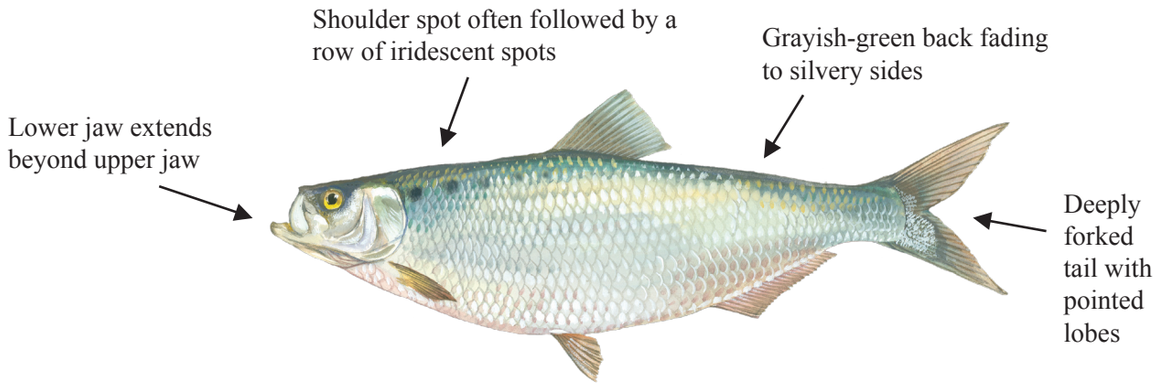
American shad (average length - 20 to 24 inches)

Alosa sapidissima



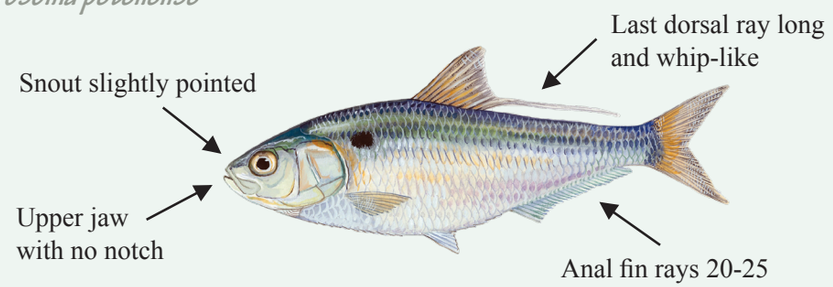
Hickory shad (average length - 12 to 20 inches)

Alosa mediocris



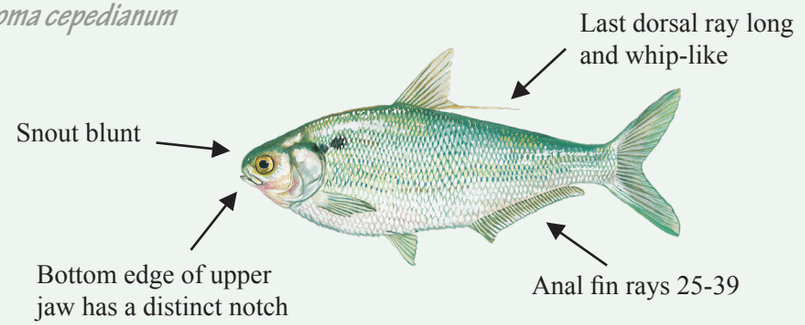
Threadfin shad (average length - 3 to 6 inches)

Dorosoma petenense



Gizzard shad (average length - 10 to 14 inches)

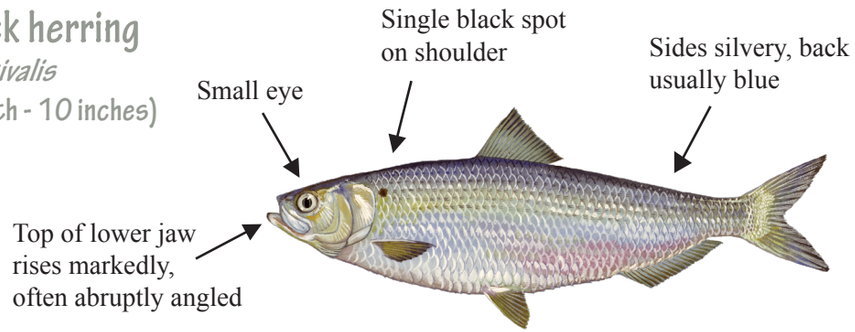
Dorosoma cepedianum



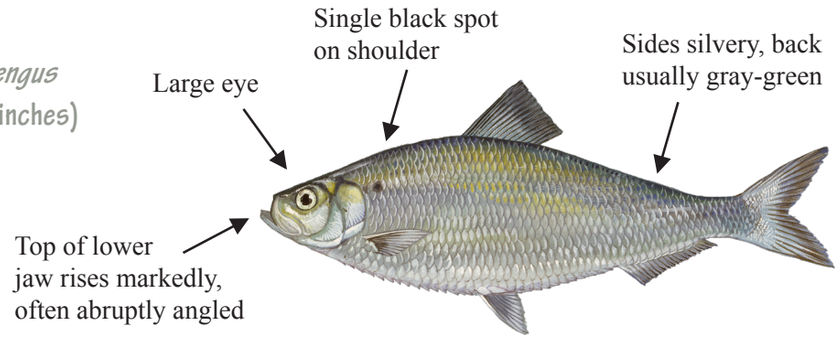
Blueback herring

Alosa aestivalis

(average length - 10 inches)



Alewife

Alosa pseudoharengus

(average length - 10 inches)