

AMERICAN SHAD

MY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Alosa sapidissima

BY THE NUMBERS

I can be from 16 to 30 inches long and weigh 4 to 7 pounds (females are usually bigger). The world record of my species is 11 pounds, 4 ounces, caught in the Connecticut River in 1986.

HOW TO IDENTIFY ME

I'm a silvery fish with a greenish band along my back and a series of dark spots along my flanks (shoulder area). My body is compressed from side to side, but long from dorsal to ventral (back to belly). I have a deeply forked tail and large, easily shed scales that create a saw-toothed edge at my belly. I get darker in color when I return to rivers.

WHY I MATTER AND REASONS FOR MY DECLINE

Since colonial days we have been prized for our meat and **roe**, or eggs. By the late 1800s, we were one of the most commercially valued fish on the east coast. Today, our populations are dramatically reduced. Overfishing, pollution, and not being able to reach our spawning habitat because of dams and other barriers, caused our decline. Fishing for us is not allowed in many states, or the number people can catch is limited.

MY STATUS

We are now protected under the Anadromous Fish Conservation Act. Along with restoring rivers and removing dams that block our migration, this Act helps us reestablish ourselves. Some of our populations are beginning to rise and become stable.

DID YOU KNOW?

- American shad are the largest member of the herring fish family.
- Their latin species name *sapidissima* means most savory or most delicious.
- They are found along the east coast of North America from Newfoundland to Florida, and are most abundant from Connecticut to North Carolina. (Figure 1)
- American shad are an **anadromous** fish, meaning they spend most of their lives in saltwater, but return to freshwater rivers to spawn and produce fish.
- Shad live in coastal ocean waters most of the time, but every year they **migrate** back to the rivers where they hatched to spawn.
- An American shad may swim over 12,000 miles during its lifetime.
- A female American shad can lay up to 600,000 eggs.
- American shad prefer to eat plankton, insects, crustaceans and small fish.
- Biologists stock hatchery-raised shad into rivers after barriers to their migration have been removed. This helps boost their local populations.
- The spring shad **run** (schools of fish swimming up a river) up the Schuylkill River helped feed George Washington's troops at Valley Forge in 1778.

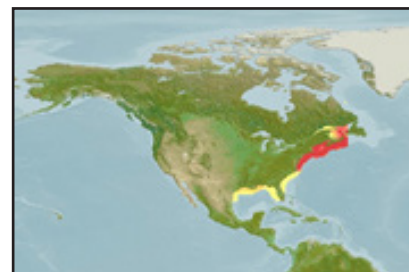


Figure 1 – Where American shad are found. The yellow to red colors indicate low to high occurrences. Credit: www.aquamaps.org.

Fish illustration by Laury Zicari, USFWS, Retired.



Website: www.fws.gov/fisheries



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MORE ABOUT US



Fishing for American shad is not allowed in many states because their numbers are too low. Fishing for hickory shad, however, is allowed and very popular. You can help recover the American shad by releasing any you accidentally catch. When American shad are in the ocean or even the lower tidal rivers, they are elusive and rarely encountered by anglers.



National and state fish hatcheries help by raising and stocking young American shad into rivers. Our goal is to increase the number of fish that will return as adults to spawn and produce new generations of shad.



American shad eggs typically hatch within a few days.



A school of young American shad in late-summer, in the upper James River, VA, are growing well. These hatchery-produced fish were stocked in spring as larvae to restore the population. They will migrate downstream to the ocean in the fall as the river begins to cool.

YOU CAN HELP ME

Get to know me, if you don't already. Help make me visible to people who don't have the chance to see me by sharing your stories about me. Get involved in efforts to help conserve my habitat and maintain my populations into the future.



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