

LAKE STURGEON

MY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Acipenser fulvescens

BY THE NUMBERS

As adults, we are 3 to 9 feet in length and weigh 10 to 80 pounds. The largest of us on record weighed 310 pounds.

HOW TO IDENTIFY ME

I have a flat shovel-shaped head, four whisker-like **barbels** below my rounded snout, and a suction-like mouth with no teeth. Like all sturgeon, I have a long forked **heterocercal** tail, the top tail of my tail fin is longer than the bottom. I have a white belly and five rows of **scutes** along a grey and brown body.

WHY I MATTER AND WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

People used to catch us for our delicious meat and eggs, called caviar. By the early 1900's, we were almost gone because of overfishing. Then, decades of pollution and damming of rivers made it hard for the rest of us to survive. In the 1970's, people started cleaning up our rivers and lakes, and stopped fishing for us.

MY STATUS

Good News! Today, there are more of us around thanks to everyone's cooperation in improving water quality, removing dams and helping us get back to our lakes and rivers.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Despite their name, lake sturgeon live in both rivers and lakes.
- They live in lakes most of the time, but every year they migrate (move) back to rivers where they were born. There they **spawn** and produce new generations of lake sturgeon.
- They spawn in fast, flowing water over rocky areas.
- Dams can block many lake sturgeon from getting back to their home river to spawn.
- They were once found from Canada to Alabama, in the Great Lakes, Hudson Bay and Mississippi River basins (Figure 1).
- They are the largest fish in the Great Lakes, growing up to 9 feet long and over 300 pounds.
- Their **barbels** help them find food like small fishes, which they capture with their suction-like mouth.
- They are one of the oldest species on the planet, that's why they look like their dinosaur ancestors. Those bony plates topped with sharp ridges on their sides and back are called **scutes**.
- They are one of the longest-lived freshwater fishes in the world.
- The oldest lake sturgeon on record was 152 years old!

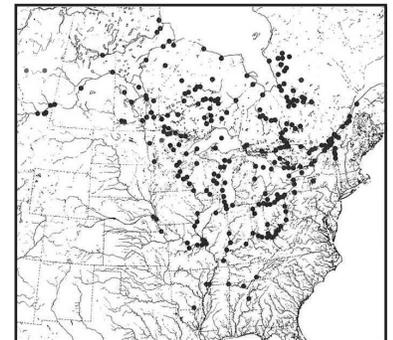


Figure 1 – Lake sturgeon range. Credit: Atlas of North American Freshwater Fishes.

Fish illustration by Laury Zicari, USFWS, Retired.



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MORE ABOUT US



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Lake sturgeon have **NO TEETH!**
They use their suction-like mouth to capture insects, mollusks and small fish.



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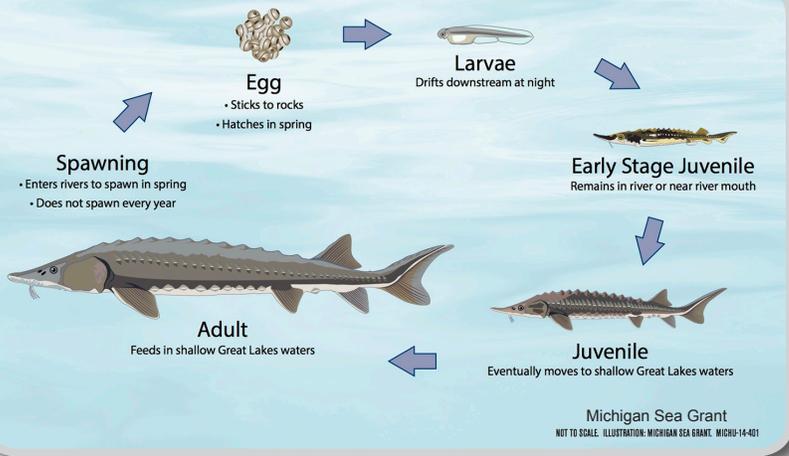
This young lake sturgeon was raised at a hatchery and stocked into a river to help boost local populations. Lake sturgeon don't reproduce until they are at least 10 to 30 years old, so it takes them a long time to build up their numbers in nature. Our national and state fish hatcheries help them out by raising, and then stocking them back into their home rivers. Our ultimate goal is for the lake sturgeon to maintain healthy populations on their own.



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Four whisker-like **barbels** hang down from their snout to help them find food on the bottom of the river or lake.

LAKE STURGEON LIFE CYCLE



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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