



## FRESHWATER FISH OF AMERICA

# ALLIGATOR GAR

*Atractosteus spatula*, (Lacepede, 1803)



Alligator gar. Photo credit: Public Domain

### FACTS AT A GLANCE

**SIZE:** Alligator gar is one of the largest freshwater fish in North America. Their common length is 79 inches with the maximum reported length being 10 feet. They can weigh up to 350 pounds.

**RANGE:** The range of these fish is from southwestern Ohio and southern Illinois to the Mississippi River drainage basin. It continues south to the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of Mexico coastal plain from the Ecofina River in Florida to Veracruz, Mexico.

**HABITAT:** Alligator gar live in sluggish pools and the back waters of large rivers, swamps, bayous, and lakes. They prefer large rivers that have overflow flood plains but have been known to enter brackish or marine waters.

**DIET:** They feed on blue crabs, turtles, waterfowl, or other birds, and small mammals.

<https://www.fws.gov/fisheries>  
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### *Natural History*

Alligator gar gather in groups near specific locations during winter and their pre-spawning periods. The spawning period for alligator gar varies depending on environmental conditions and their geographic location, but usually occurs when water temperatures reach approximately 73.4 degrees Fahrenheit. A female alligator gar will expel her eggs over submerged aquatic vegetation and males will fertilize the eggs with their milt, or semen.

Alligator gar eggs normally hatch between 48 to 72 hours after having been laid. Larval gar will remain attached to the aquatic vegetation until their egg yolks are absorbed. The yolk sac absorption stage normally lasts between 5 to 10 days. After their yolks have been absorbed, the young gar will detach themselves from the vegetation and begin to search for food. Juvenile gar feed on plankton, invertebrates, amphibians, and fish.

### *Conservation*

Alligator gar are considered a recreational species in several states. In fact, recreational fishing has grown enough to where those states have strengthened the fishing regulations to maintain trophy gar fisheries. This species has been classified as rare in Missouri, threatened in Illinois, and endangered in Arkansas and Kentucky.