

FISH

SHORTNOSE STURGEON

ABOUT

The Shortnose Sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*) is anadromous (migrating from salt water to spawn in freshwater) and shares the same general form of all sturgeon, with a body surface displaying five rows of bony plates or scutes. This species is the smallest of the three sturgeon found in eastern North America and has a short, conical snout with four barbels (beard-like appendages) in front of its large under-slung mouth. Body coloration is olive-yellow to gray or bluish on its back, with a milky-white to dark yellow belly. The largest are known to grow to 4.7 ft in length (1.4m), weighing in at 50.7 pounds (23 kg). The fastest growing fish occur among southern populations. Males rarely live longer than 30 years, but females have lived as long as 67 years. The maturity rates of this species differ on their geographic location (north versus south), but unlike most fish species, spawning is not a yearly event for Shortnose Sturgeon. Males spawn every other year and females every third year, laying between 40,000-200,000 eggs, which usually hatch within 13 days. Newly hatched fry are poor swimmers and drift with the currents along the bottom. Adult Shortnose Sturgeon feed primarily on large mollusks and crustaceans.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1967 the Shortnose Sturgeon was listed as endangered. A combination of factors may account for the decline in its numbers. For instance, over decades, large tidal rivers like the Hudson served as a dumping ground for pollutants that led to major oxygen depletion in the water, resulting in a high loss of fish. Another threat to the species is the enormous popularity and consumption of its smoked flesh and eggs (caviar), with sturgeon stocks over-exploited for many decades at an unsustainable level. In addition, damming rivers for hydro-electricity and navigation purposes prevent the fish from reaching upriver spawning grounds. It is now illegal to kill or possess this fish, and that combined with improvements in water quality and habitat protection efforts are offering Shortnose Sturgeon a better future.

For more detailed information visit: www.dec.stat.ny.us or www.nmfs.noaa.gov

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What is a baby Shortnose Sturgeon called?

- a) Caviar
- b) Hatchling
- c) Spawn
- d) Fry

Answer is D.

