

SPECIES OF CONCERN

RIVER HERRING

Alosa pseudoharengus & *A. aestivalis* (alewife & blueback herring)



Alewife. Credit: Jim Negus, TN Wildlife Resources



Blueback. Credit: Jim Negus, TN Wildlife Resources

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Size Blueback herring reach a maximum size of approximately 16 inches while Alewife can grow to between 14 and 15 inches.
Distinguishing Characteristics Alewives are relatively deep bodied and laterally compressed fish that are grayish green above, darkest on the dorsal surface, and silver ventrally. There is often a dusky spot on adults at eye level on either side behind the margin of the gill cover. Blueback herring are similar in appearance, however, they can be distinguished by differences in eye diameter, body depth and peritoneum (abdominal cavity membrane) color.

HABITAT & BEHAVIOR

Habitat Alewives are distributed from Newfoundland to North Carolina. Blueback herring are found from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia to St. John's River in Florida. Both spawn over gravel, sand, detritus and submerged aquatic vegetation, all of which are found in large rivers, small streams, ponds and large lakes.
Behavior Both alewife and blueback herring are pelagic, schooling species. While at sea, they undertake seasonal migrations in response to changing water temperatures and diel vertical migrations in response to prey movement and availability. They are anadromous, ascending coastal rivers in the spring to spawn. Both are planktivores, feeding primarily on ctenophores, calanoid copepods, amphipods, mysids and other pelagic shrimp and small fish while at sea.

STATUS

Areas of Concern Anadromous stocks distributed from Maine to Florida
Factors for Decline Dams & other impediments, habitat degradation, fishing, bycatch, and predation from striped bass.
Conservation Designation None

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LIFE HISTORY

Adult Alewife spawn in late winter/early summer in the southern portion of their range and progressively move northward as water temperatures rise. They reach sexual maturity by age 4. Females are capable of producing between 60,000 and 300,000 eggs annually throughout their range. Blueback herring spawn from late March through mid-May, depending on latitude. Female blueback herring mature by age 5 and produce between 60,000 and 103,000 eggs. Males generally mature earlier, between age 3 and 4, and at a smaller size than females.

STATUS OF HUMAN INTERACTIONS

Threats to both species that have most likely contributed to their decline include: decreased access to spawning areas due to habitat loss from the construction of dams and other impediments to migration, habitat degradation, and fishing. River herring are also taken as bycatch in other ocean fisheries that use various gear types such as gillnets, bottom otter trawls and menhaden purse seines. In response to the declining trend for river herring, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and North Carolina have instituted moratoria on taking and possessing river herring in state waters (0-3 miles from the coast).

For additional information, please contact NOAA Fisheries Service at (978) 281.9300 or visit us online at http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/CandidateSpeciesProgram/index.html.