

Did you know?

- The Shortnose Sturgeon is among the **oldest living fish species** in the world! Their appearance today is almost the same as when the dinosaurs walked the Earth over 200 million years ago!
- The Shortnose Sturgeon inhabits the lower sections of most large rivers and coastal waters on the Atlantic coast, with the **smallest numbers of adult fish** inhabiting the Cape Fear River!
- Female Shortnose Sturgeon have been known to reach **67 years old**. Males seldom exceed age 30.
- Shortnose Sturgeon can grow up to **3.5 feet long**, but the age of maturity varies from north to south along the Atlantic Coast. In the Cape Fear River, male sturgeon mature at around 3-5 years of age, while males in the St. John River in Canada reach maturity around age 13!
- Each river in which the Shortnose Sturgeon live is considered to contain **a unique stock of the fish**, also called a distinct population segment.
- You can **observe live Shortnose Sturgeon at the NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher**, which came from a captive bred population representing the Savannah River.

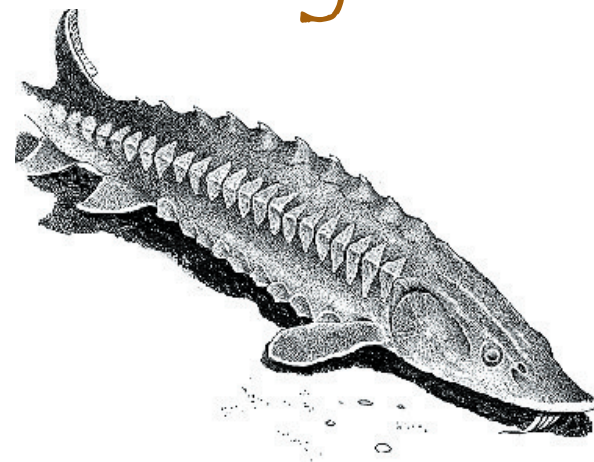


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The

Shortnose Sturgeon



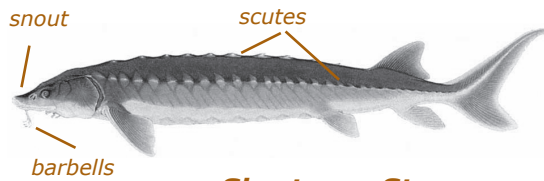
**An Endangered Species
found in the Cape Fear River**

The Shortnose Sturgeon is found along the Atlantic coast from Canada to Florida. Historically, Shortnose Sturgeon were widely reported in North Carolina rivers, but as a result of pollution, loss of habitat, dams, and other threats, it is on the brink of extinction.

In 1967, the Shortnose Sturgeon was listed as an endangered species. In 1996, only 50 fish were estimated to inhabit the Cape Fear River.

What does it look like?

The Shortnose Sturgeon is a primitive-looking fish with a long body and a wide mouth that points downward beneath a short snout. Under its snout are four barbells that look like droopy whiskers, but serve as sensory organs. It has a blackish head and back, yellowish-brown body, and a pale underside. It has five rows of sharp, pointed plates called scutes that protect it from predators. The Shortnose Sturgeon typically grows to about 3.5 feet long.



Shortnose Sturgeon
"Acipenser brevirostrum"

Where does it live?

The Shortnose Sturgeon is an anadromous fish, meaning it lives in coastal waters but moves into freshwater such as the Cape Fear River to spawn (lay eggs). Spawning usually occurs February through June. Juvenile sturgeons may remain in freshwater up to 5 years after hatching before migrating to the coastal waters.

What does it eat?

Shortnose Sturgeon are benthic (bottom) feeders that feed on a variety of crustaceans, bivalves, plants, insects, and occasionally small fish.

What is threatening survival of the species?

Pollution—Stormwater runoff carries pollution directly into the Cape Fear River. This pollution includes sediment, bacteria, chemicals, nutrients, and toxic metals such as mercury that adversely affect fish health and survival. Some of these pollutants can even reduce the amount of oxygen that sturgeon need to survive.



Dams—Locks and dams can disrupt the ability of fish to move upriver to spawn.

Dredging—Maintenance dredging of navigation channels such as the Cape Fear River can lethally harm Shortnose Sturgeon, as well as destroy benthic feeding areas, disrupt spawning migrations, and increase turbidity.

Non-Native Species—The presence of non-native species in the ecosystem may impose genetic threats, spread disease, and introduce new predators and competitors for food and habitat.

Commercial/Recreational Fishing—Activities such as shad gill net fisheries can disrupt spawning migrations and cause accidental takes.

Cooling Water Intakes—Fish are susceptible to getting trapped on cooling water intake screens for power plants, factories, etc.

What can YOU do to help?

The best way that you can help the plight of the Shortnose Sturgeon is to reduce polluted stormwater runoff.

In Wilmington, runoff flows directly into the Cape Fear River, the Intracoastal Waterway, and the Atlantic Ocean without being treated.

Stormwater runoff carries pollution such as sediment, pet waste, litter, fertilizers, pesticides, and chemicals into our waterways which impacts plants and animals such as the Shortnose Sturgeon.

For information on how you can help keep Wilmington's waterways clean, visit:

www.wilmingtonnc.gov/publicservices/stormwater



The Cape Fear River Basin is the largest river basin in North Carolina, stretching from the Piedmont to the coast. It incorporates 6,049 miles of river and streams and 100+ cities and towns. Reducing polluted runoff into the Cape Fear River could enable species such as the Shortnose Sturgeon to recover and thrive.

Where to report a sighting or accidental catch?

It is unlawful to fish for or possess an endangered species. To report an accidental catch or violation, contact:

NC Wildlife Resources Commission
(800) 662-7137