

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Shovelnose Sturgeon *Scaphirhynchus platyrhynchus*

Range/Habitat

- The original range of the shovelnose sturgeon was the large rivers of the Mississippi River basin from Montana and south to Louisiana; the Mobile Bay drainage in Alabama and Mississippi; the Tennessee River; and the Upper Rio Grande in New Mexico. The fish now is common in the Mississippi Basin, rare in Mobile Bay drainage and extinct in the Rio Grande.
- The usual habitat of this sturgeon tends to be the bottom of main channels and bays of large, turbid rivers, where currents are strong enough to keep the gravel substrate clear of silt.
- It is usually found in depths of 6 to 23 feet (2 - 7 m).

Physical Characteristics

- The shovelnose sturgeon has a broad shovel-shaped snout with four fringed barbels in front of its mouth, which is on the underside of its head.
- The upper and lower lips each have four distinct fleshy lobes.
- Its body tapers abruptly towards the tail to a slender well armored caudal peduncle that is flat in cross section and is covered with bony plates.
- Scale-like scutes, or bony external plates, are on the belly except in the smallest young.
- The shovelnose sturgeon is pale to medium gray or brownish on the top and sides and is white below.
- The maximum length is recorded at 3.3 feet (100 cm) and the maximum published weight is 11 lbs. (4.8 kg).

Diet/Feeding

- The bulk of the diet of the shovelnose sturgeon consists of aquatic insect larvae, especially burrowing mayflies and caddisfly larvae.
- This fish cruises the bottom of the rivers where it detects prey with sensitive barbels and vacuums the food items up through its long tubular mouth.

Conservation Status

- The shovelnose sturgeon is listed as “vulnerable” on the IUCN Red List.
- Its international trade has been restricted under CITES Appendix II since 1998.
- Overall, its numbers have decreased sharply since 1900, but it still remains abundant off the main channels of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers.
- It has not been seen in Alabama during the last half-century and is thought to be extinct there.

Additional Information

- The shovelnose sturgeon is a slow-growing fish that is long-lived, some attaining 43 years of age or more.
- Spawning is reported to occur from April to June in large rivers in areas with swift currents and coarse substrates.
- It is the most common mid-American sturgeon.

- At one time it was considered worthless and regarded as a nuisance by fishermen. However, after about 1900, the shovelnose sturgeon was recognized as being valuable as a smoked fish product and its roe is valued as caviar.
- In past years, the sturgeon was exploited as food and byproducts. Today, the industry processes only a small fraction of the historic peak catch numbers.

Sources

www.fishbase.net

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The Fishes of Tennessee. Etnier, D. A. and Starnes, W. C., pgs 102 -103