



## Round Whitefish Fact Sheet

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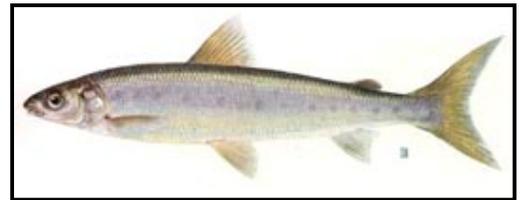
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### Round Whitefish *Prosopium cylindraceum*

New York Status: **Endangered**

#### Description

The round whitefish is a medium-sized fish, averaging 8-12 inches in length and occasionally reaching 22 inches. Its body shape is long and tubular with a nearly round midsection (hence its name). Its head is short and its mouth is small and inferior (snout extends beyond lower jaw). A single flap exists between the nostrils, distinguishing it from other whitefishes and ciscoes. The round whitefish is olive-brown on top shading to silver below. Young round whitefish have rows of black spots (called parr marks) similar to those of young trout and salmon.



#### Life History

Round whitefish spawn in the fall (November-December) over gravel shoals of lakes or at river mouths. The males arrive on the spawning grounds first. Eggs are broadcast over the shoals and hatch approximately 140 days later. The young reach 3-4.5 inches by the end of the first year of life. Both sexes become mature when they reach about 12 inches in length at age 3-4. Adult round whitefish rarely live longer than 13 years.

Round whitefish are bottom feeders. They eat a variety of invertebrates including mayfly larvae, chironomid larvae, small mollusks, crustaceans, fish, and fish eggs.

#### Distribution and Habitat

In North America, the round whitefish is found from Alaska in the northwest to Labrador and New England in the east. With the exception of Lake Erie, the round whitefish's distribution includes the Great Lakes. Only seven New York State waters are known to contain round whitefish populations. Lake Ontario's population provides a limited commercial fishery in Ontario even today, but the last catch in New York State was 1942. Many lakes in the Adirondacks contained this species.

#### Population Status

Once fairly common throughout the Adirondacks, the round whitefish could be found in about 60 different lakes including Big Tupper, Piseco, Big Wolf, Raquette, Blue Mountain, Meacham, and the Fulton Chain. Many lakes were stocked with hatchery reared fry between 1886 and about 1904, but the consequences were uncertain. However, surveys conducted from 1985-1987 by New York State's Division of Fish and Wildlife could only find round whitefish populations in six Adirondack water bodies.

Surveys conducted before 1979 found them in only 14 waters and surveys between 1979 and 1997 found them in only nine.

Possible reasons for the decline in round whitefish populations include: predation by invading yellow perch on whitefish eggs and fry; predation by smallmouth bass; competition with lake whitefish; overfishing; loss of spawning sites; siltation; and lake acidification. Some of these factors continue to pose a threat to remaining populations. Round whitefish are now protected from harvest or possession by the Endangered Species Law.

### **Management/Research Needs**

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation plans to conduct research to verify and/or establish secure, abundant and self-sustaining populations of round whitefish in at least five Adirondack lakes. If necessary, remnant stocks of round whitefish will be enhanced through artificial propagation.

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