



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Connecticut River Coordinator's Office

Restoring Migratory Fish to the Connecticut River Basin

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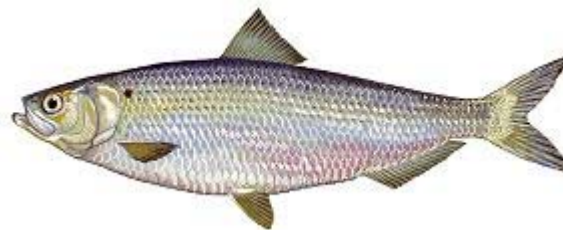
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Description

Blueback herring (*Alosa aestivalis*) are closely related to alewives. Both species are also collectively known as river herring. Blueback herring are silvery with bluish coloration dorsally and whitish coloration ventrally. Bluebacks have a deeper blue-colored back than the alewife. Blueback herring average less than 12 inches in length and weigh roughly half a pound.



Life History

Blueback herring are anadromous, migrating from the ocean to freshwater specifically to reproduce. Adults enter the Connecticut River as early as April, spawning between April and July in fast moving, shallow water in the mainstem and tributaries. Juveniles stay in the watershed throughout the summer and into the fall, when they migrate to the ocean. The Connecticut River mainstem serves as juvenile nursery habitat for

the blueback herring.

Distribution

Blueback herring are found from Nova Scotia to Florida. In the Connecticut River watershed, they have been documented in the mainstem and its larger tributaries as far north as the Vernon Dam fish ladder (just north of the Massachusetts/Vermont border, 134 miles upstream).

Status

The blueback herring is protected under the Anadromous Fish Conservation Act. Numbers decreased throughout the 1800's and the first half of the 1900's due to pollution and dams. Since the restoration effort began in the 1960's, populations increased from less than 500 to hundreds of thousands by 1980, and remained steady through 1992 (see [Migratory Fish Return Numbers](#)). However, the blueback herring runs have dropped dramatically in recent years and have numbered less than 2,000 as recently as 2003.

Restoration Efforts

The blueback herring is a Federal trust fish, meaning that the Federal government has some responsibility for its recovery. Blueback herring restoration is a cooperative effort between the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, other Federal agencies, State fish and wildlife departments, private organizations, and industry. Habitat surveys for blueback herring and alewives have been performed in both Connecticut and Massachusetts. Management practices include providing access to habitat by building fish passage facilities, trapping and trucking adult herring to safe, vacant habitat for natural spawning, and monitoring populations.

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