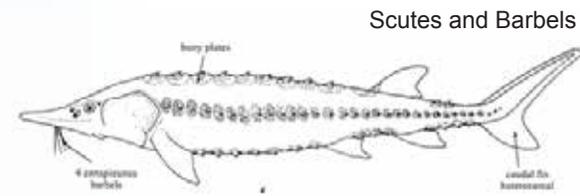


## Identification

- Sturgeon is the common name used for some 25 species of fish in the family Acipenseridae; seven species occur in North America. Sturgeon are closely related to paddlefishes (family Polyodontidae).
- Sturgeon have heavy elongate bodies, a flattened head that ends in an extended snout, five rows of scutes (hard bony plates) on their body, and four chin barbels.
- The caudal fin is deeply forked and distinctly asymmetrical with the upper lobe longer than the lower (i.e., heterocercal).
- Shortnose sturgeon is the smallest of all sturgeon and grows to about 4.5 feet; the largest sturgeon in North America is the white sturgeon that grows to 20 feet; the Beluga sturgeon grows to 24 feet in length and is found in the Caspian and Black Sea.



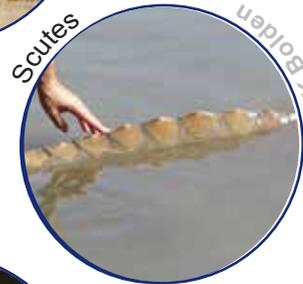
Scutes and Barbels

## Biology and Behavior

- Primarily cartilaginous, they lack a vertebral centrum, and are covered with bony plates called scutes rather than scales.
- Locate food with barbels that are in front of their mouth.
- Locate invertebrates in the sand (crabs, worms, etc.) with barbels, suck them up with protrusible mouth and swallow whole (no teeth!)
- Sturgeon “jump” or breach – no one knows why but it could be to communicate or remove parasites.
- Sturgeon spawn in freshwater, and most are anadromous meaning they move between freshwater spawning habitat and brackish/saltwater feeding habitat.



Flattened head and snout



Scutes



Barbels & protrusible mouth



Barbels & protrusible mouth

## Did You Know...

- Sturgeon first appeared in the fossil record approximately 200 million years ago at the end of the Triassic Period; they are commonly referred to as living fossils as they undergone remarkably little morphological change since. With the dinosaurs
- Sturgeon are found only in the northern hemisphere.
- Sturgeon are prized for their unfertilized roe and meat. The roe is treated with salt and sold as caviar, a gourmet delicacy. The meat is smoked, frozen or marinated. Small quantities of caviar are used as ingredients in cosmetic products, such as facial creams. The swim bladders are dried, and then used to produce isinglass which is used to clarify wine and beer. Their predictable movement into rivers to spawn made them easy to catch with nets.
- Sturgeon farming (aquaculture) is gaining momentum as an alternative to wild caught caviar and meat.

For more information about sturgeon visit:



About NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office

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