

# Atlantic Sturgeon



photos-Art Michaels



*Juvenile Atlantic sturgeon*

## Atlantic Sturgeon

**Family:** Sturgeon (Acipenseridae).

**Anadromous.**

**Status:** Endangered.

**PA Watershed Range:** Delaware.



When you look for record-breaking fish in Pennsylvania, check out the Atlantic sturgeon. As Pennsylvania's largest fish, it may reach 14 feet in length. Atlantic sturgeon are also likely the longest-lived fish in Pennsylvania: They have been known to be more than 50 years old. Sturgeon relatives date back more than 350 million years! Atlantic sturgeon don't look quite like other fish. Instead of their having scales, Atlantic sturgeon are covered with rows of bony plates, called "scutes." The snout has four whiskerlike sensory barbels near the mouth. The top tail lobe is longer

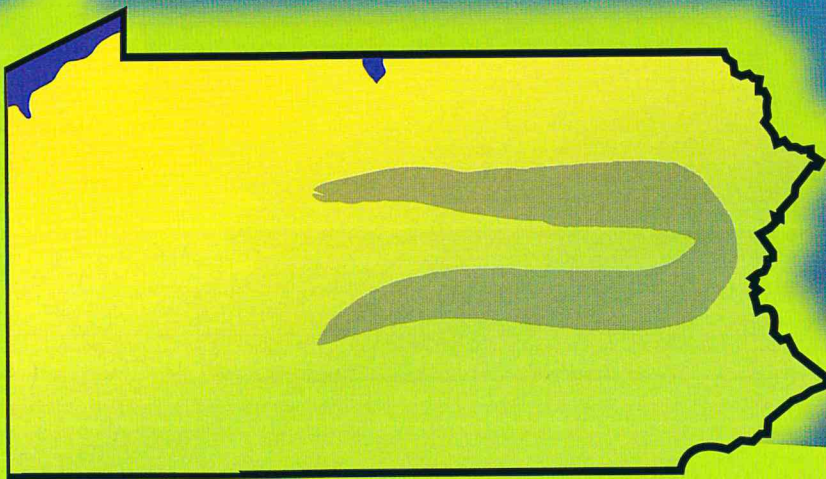
than the bottom lobe, and it looks like a shark's tail.

Adult sturgeon live on the bottom of the ocean and use their snout to root along the bottom for small clams, crabs and other invertebrates. These anadromous fish are found from Quebec to Florida. They swim through the Chesapeake and Delaware bays in spring on their way into large rivers, which they use as spawning grounds and nurseries. Young Atlantic sturgeon may spend up to five years in nursery waters. Atlantic sturgeon are endangered in Pennsylvania.

# American Eel



photo-Rob Criswell



## American Eel

**Family:** Eels (Anguillidae).

**Catadromous.**

**PA Watershed Range:**

**Ohio, Potomac,  
Susquehanna, Delaware.**

The American eel is a mysterious fish that is often mistaken for a snake. It might be long and slender as a snake, but that's as far as the similarities go. Eels are covered with tiny smooth scales, which make them almost impossible to grab.

Some anglers have never seen an eel. One reason is that eels are nocturnal predators. Another reason is that some rivers have dams that block their migration.

This unique fish also has a unique life cycle. Scientists didn't understand the eel's migratory life cycle until the early 1900s. It is our state's only catadromous fish: It lives in fresh water and spawns in salt water, the opposite behavior from what most

people know as "migratory," like the behavior of the anadromous American shad and striped bass.

The American eel begins life in the Sargasso Sea, an area of the Atlantic Ocean near Bermuda. After hatching, eels are called "glass eels" because they are transparent. Glass eels transform into "elvers" once they reach America. Female eels stay in estuaries while the males ascend rivers and streams. They live the rest of their lives in fresh water until they head back to the ocean to spawn.

How is that for a complicated lifestyle? Now you can see how a dam might block their migration!