

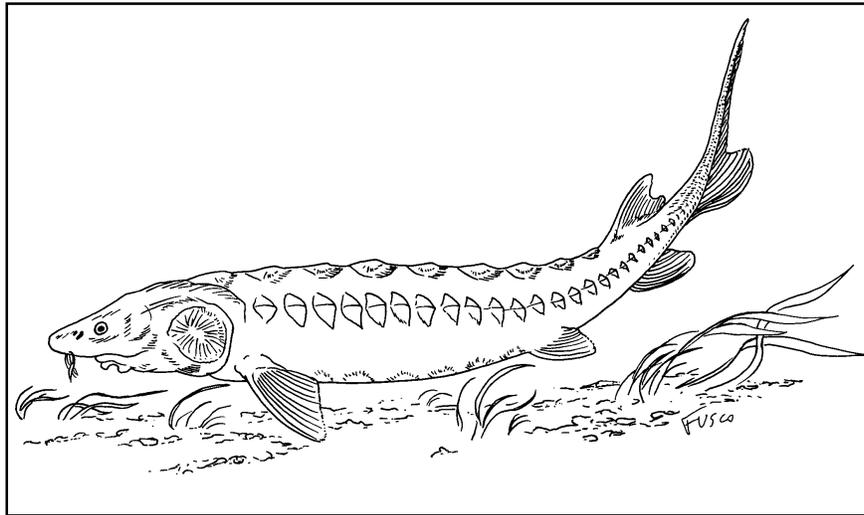
# WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

## ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES SERIES

### SHORTNOSE STURGEON

*Acipenser brevirostrum*

**ENDANGERED**



**Habitat:** Main channel of large rivers, estuaries, and open ocean; may be found in all water depths in rivers.

**Weight:** Adults average about 8 pounds.

**Length:** Adults, 36-38 inches.

**Life Expectancy:** Ages from 50 to 75 years have been reported.

**Food:** Primarily invertebrates, insects, crustaceans, mollusks, and snails.

**Status:** Federally and state endangered.

**Identification:** Sturgeon are primitive-looking fishes, with a heterocercal tail (the upper lobe is much longer than the lower lobe) and a body covered with 5 rows of large bony plates. These heavy, cylindrical fish have an elongated, bony snout, with a tube-like mouth located on the underside of the head. The mouth protrudes several inches when the fish is feeding. Shortnose sturgeon range in color from grayish-olive to brownish above, shading to white on the belly.

Shortnose sturgeon can be distinguished from Atlantic sturgeon by the relative width of their mouths. Shortnose sturgeon could be called "bigmouth" sturgeon; their mouth widths (inside the lips) are greater than 60 percent of the distance between the eyes, while Atlantic sturgeon have small mouths that measure 50 percent or less of the distance measured between the eyes.

**Range:** Shortnose sturgeon are restricted to the east coast of North America, from the St. John River in New

Brunswick, Canada, to the Indian River in Florida. Two populations of shortnose sturgeon can be found in the Connecticut River. One group is landlocked between the Holyoke and Turners Falls Dams in Massachusetts. The other group occurs in the lower Connecticut River from the Holyoke Dam to Long Island Sound.

**Reproduction:** Shortnose sturgeon have very specific spawning requirements. All spawning occurs in fresh water within a 1- to 2-week period, from the end of April to the first week of May. If environmental conditions are not acceptable, shortnose sturgeon will not spawn, resorbing their eggs and milt (sperm). Females only spawn every 3 to 5 years after reaching sexual maturity at age 8 to 12. Males likely spawn every year after reaching age 6 to 10.

**Reason for Decline:** Shortnose sturgeon populations in North America have declined due to overfishing, loss

of habitat, limited access to spawning areas and water pollution.

**History in Connecticut:** The number of shortnose sturgeon present in Connecticut waters prior to the 1980s is unknown. It is likely that shortnose sturgeon caught in the shad and Atlantic sturgeon fisheries were kept or sold, but not recorded.

**Interesting Facts:** Sturgeon are among the oldest living species of fish. They have retained many primitive characteristics, suggesting what fish may have looked like during the age of the dinosaurs. The almost two dozen species of sturgeon can only be found in the Northern Hemisphere. Seven of these species occur in North America.

Sturgeon are occasionally seen jumping clear out of the water (breaching). It is unknown why sturgeon breach, although it has been suggested that they may be attempting to rid themselves of parasites.

Among fishes, sturgeon are very slow-growing and long-lived. Once they reach adult size, sturgeon have no

natural enemies except humans. The largest recorded shortnose sturgeon, a female weighing over 90 pounds, was captured in the St. John River in Canada.

**Protective Legislation:** *Federal* - Endangered Species Act of 1973. *State* - Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 26-112-45(1) and 26-311.

**What You Can Do:** Some sturgeon are unnecessarily killed by people wanting to learn the identity of the fish. Become familiar with various fish species by consulting identification keys and pictures before going fishing. Return all live sturgeon to the water after capture. All dead specimens should be reported to the DEP Fisheries Division. It is illegal to keep any shortnose sturgeon taken in Connecticut waters. If you catch or observe a sturgeon, please report it to the Marine Fisheries Office (203-434-6043). Documented reports of sturgeon smaller than 18 inches are extremely rare, and all sightings of these small sturgeon are especially sought by the Fisheries Division.