

Maryland Fishery Resources Office

Northern Snakehead (*Channa argus*)



Biological Synopsis:

The northern snakehead (*Channa argus*) is a native of the Yangtze River basin in China. It can reach over 33 inches in length and tolerate a wide range of temperatures (32-85°F). This fish prefers stagnant shallow ponds, swamps, or slow moving streams and rivers with mud substrate and aquatic vegetation. Female snakeheads average about 40,000 eggs but can release up to 100,000 eggs and may spawn multiple times per year. Newly hatched larvae are protected by one or both parents until they reach the juvenile stage. Sexual maturity is reached in two years when the total body length is about 12 inches.



Adult Northern Snakehead



Juvenile Northern Snakehead

Environmental Concern: The northern snakehead has been described as a voracious predator of fishes, freshwater crustaceans, and amphibians. Northern snakehead populations could become established throughout most of the contiguous United States and possibly adjoining Canadian provinces. Because of their feeding style, they could outcompete popular sport fish such as largemouth bass. Biologists are also concerned that they could introduce parasites and diseases that could harm native species.

What is being done: Unfortunately, northern snakeheads have become firmly established in over 120 river miles of the tidal Potomac River. The recent documentation of snakehead in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal suggests that this species may have gained access to the nontidal Potomac River upstream of Great Falls. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with its partners, continue to conduct research to assess impacts on the ecosystem and effects of the snakehead introduction on fish populations. Research conducted in the Potomac River includes electrofishing surveys to determine distribution and feeding habits, telemetry tagging to assess daily and seasonal behavior, and angler surveys to determine effects of the growing snakehead population on recreational fishing. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, D.C. Fisheries and Wildlife, and The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have placed reward tags on snakeheads to estimate the size of the population in the Potomac River and learn more about how they are moving in the river and its tributaries. Learning about the biology and behavior of this fish will help biologists determine more efficient methods of removal and control.

What can you do? If you catch a northern snakehead, kill it and DO NOT put it back in the water. Please kill the fish by removing gill arches, head, or gutting. Record location of your catch and take a photo if possible. If the snakehead has a tag, measure the length, make note of the exact location of capture, and call the toll free number printed on the tag. Information that you provide is important in determining control and management strategies.

See reverse side for agency contact information

Contacts:

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