

Blueback Herring

Alosa aestivalis

Blueback Herring (*Alosa aestivalis*) is a small to medium fish reaching 15 inches in length. These fish are anadromous, meaning they move upstream to spawn, but spend most of their life in the ocean. They have a deep silvery body with keeled belly scales. Blueback herring are differentiated from the similar alewife by the blueback's smaller eye and blue-grey sheen on its back.

Description

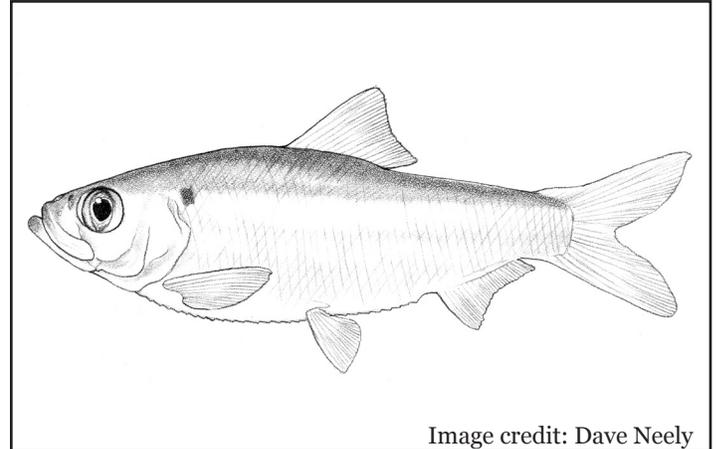


Image credit: Dave Neely



Herring serve as an important food source for numerous gamefish including striped bass and bluefish, as well as supporting their own commercial fishery.

In 1931, 25 million pounds of blueback herring and alewife were harvested from Maryland waters. This represents the second largest harvest of finfish in the Chesapeake Bay and the largest ever from Maryland. Since 1970, Herring catches have dropped dramatically. These declines can be attributed to reductions in spawning habitat as a result of dams and other impoundments of freshwater rivers, reduced water quality, and increased sediments.

General Information

Range/Habitat

Like most shad and herring, bluebacks spend their life at sea and travel up freshwater rivers every spring to spawn. Herring travel up to 1200 miles to reach their spawning grounds. Blueback herring can be found along the East Coast of the United States and Canada from Nova Scotia all the way to Florida. In Maryland, herring utilize most of the larger tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay, traveling upstream until they reach the first major river blockage or their spawning grounds.



Above: Maryland DNR biologists electrofish at the Bloede Dam on the Patapsco River. Teams investigated the presence of blueback herring and their use of a fish ladder to move upstream of the dam.