

North Carolina Sport Fish Profiles



Hickory shad

Scientific Name:

Alosa mediocris

Other Names:

Male hickory shad are often called bucks, and females are often called roes or roe shad.

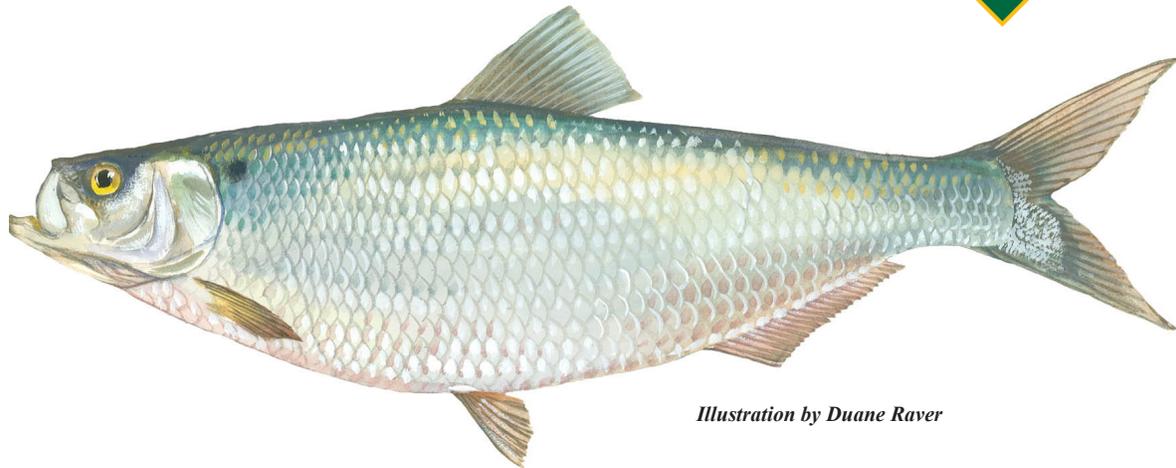


Illustration by Duane Raver

Identification:

A long, compressed fish, the hickory shad is grayish green on top fading to silvery on the sides with a dark spot on the shoulder, often followed by several less distinct dark spots. The tail is deeply forked with pointed lobes. The hickory shad is distinguished from the American shad by a lower jaw that projects beyond the upper jaw. It is also usually smaller than American shad but larger than alewife and blueback herring.

Habitats and Habits:

Native to the Atlantic coast, hickory shad are anadromous fish, spending the majority of their life at sea and entering freshwater only in the spring to spawn. Each spring, hickory shad ascend the Roanoke, Chowan, Neuse and Tar rivers in North Carolina. These migrations are called “shad runs” and may cover hundreds of miles to the headwaters of these systems. Hickory shad typically spawn during the night in shallow water with a rocky bottom when water temperatures are between 58 F and 62 F.

Little is known about hickory shad during their life at sea. Studies suggest that hickory shad, like American shad, feed on small fish, squid, fish eggs, small crabs and crustaceans.

Fishing Techniques:

Hickory shad are fun to catch during their spring spawning run as they will strike flies, small spoons and artificial lures. Anglers typically fish for hickory shad on light spinning gear rigged with shad darts or spoons on 4-to 8-pound test line, although increasing numbers of anglers are refining their fly-fishing skills for hickory shad. Shad darts are a favored lure when fished by casting upstream into the current and retrieving as it sinks and drifts downstream. Hickory shad may be at varying depths and currents, so anglers should alter their presentation accordingly. For fly-fishing anglers, lures of choice are a small Clouser minnow or Crazy Charlie. Although many anglers harvest a daily creel limit of 10 shad, catch and release is popular, especially during peak season when a successful angler may tangle with more than 100 fish per day.



Hickory shad (continued)

Good Places to Fish:

The Roanoke River is considered by many anglers to be the premier destination for hickory shad. Fishing opportunities are also abundant in many other North Carolina coastal rivers and creeks including the Cashie, Tar and Neuse rivers, as well as Contentnea Creek.

In the Roanoke River, hickory shad begin appearing in the lower river near Plymouth in late February and early March, and subsequently, in the upper river near Weldon in mid-March. Peak hickory shad fishing near Weldon varies from year to year but is usually from mid-March to early April when water temperatures are between 52 F and 58 F. If their timing is right, bank-bound anglers frequently can catch fish along the shorelines adjacent to the Commission's boating access areas at Weldon and Williamston on the Roanoke. In addition, "shoulder-to-shoulder" hickory shad fishing may be found on the Cashie River in Windsor.

For boat or bank anglers, a good place to fish for hickory shad on the Tar River is the Bell's Bridge area north of Tarboro. Using the Commission's boating access area (locate access areas here), boat anglers may head upstream to Swift Creek or downstream to Fishing Creek. Although bank access is limited, bank anglers may find success along this shoreline. Another good spot to catch hickory shad for boat and bank anglers on the Tar River is near Battle Park in Rocky Mount. Young and adult anglers should be sure to check out the annual hickory shad tournament on the Tar River hosted by the Tarboro Association of Saltwater Sportsman.

Popular hickory shad fishing spots on the Neuse River include Pitchkettle Creek near Fort Barnell (Craven County), mouth of Contentnea Creek near Grifton (Lenoir/Craven county line), and mouth of Bear Creek near LaGrange (Lenoir County). For those interested in a spring festival dedicated to hickory shad, check out the Grifton Shad Festival.

Other Information:

NCARP Minimum Requirements: 2 pounds or 13 inches

State Record: 4 lbs., 1 ounce, from Pitchkettle Creek, Feb. 22, 2004

World Record: Tie: 2 lbs., 3 oz., from Narragansett, R.I., Oct. 29, 2004; from Long Island, N.Y., Nov. 23, 2003*

** Anglers provide information on their potential world-record catches directly to the International Game Fish Association, which maintains the world records for sport fishing.*