

# North Carolina Sport Fish Profiles



## American Shad

**Scientific Name:**  
*Alosa sapidissima*

**Other Common Names:**  
white shad, shad; male shad are often called bucks, and female shad are often called roes or roe shad.



### Identification:

The largest member of the herring family (Clupeidae), the American shad is a deep-bodied fish with silvery-white sides and a row of dark spots along the sides. When held at an angle, the American shad may appear to have a greenish-to dark-bluish metallic shine along the back. It has a single dorsal fin and a deeply forked tail. Similar in appearance to hickory shad, the American shad has a lower jaw that does not extend beyond snout.

### Habitats and Habits:

Native to Atlantic slope basins, American shad are an anadromous species, meaning that they spend the majority of their adult life in the ocean and only enter freshwater in the spring to spawn. Each spring, American shad ascend the Roanoke, Chowan, Neuse, Tar and Cape Fear rivers in North Carolina. These migrations are called “shad runs” and may cover hundreds of miles to the headwaters of these systems. American shad typically spawn during the night in shallow water areas over rocky bottoms when water temperatures are between 60 F and 68 F.

During the spawning run, American shad eat very little if anything at all. As juveniles, American shad feed primarily on plankton, but they also eat small crustaceans, insects, fish eggs, algae and small fishes. At sea, adult American shad have a number of predators, including sharks, bluefin tuna, king mackerel and porpoises. During their migration out of freshwater rivers to estuaries and then eventually to the ocean, juvenile shad are subject to a variety of environmental conditions as well as predation by bass, catfish, eels and birds.

The Commission, along with cooperators such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Dominion Resources, is working to restore the American shad run in the Roanoke River. Several million American shad fry are raised at the Watha State Fish Hatchery and the Edenton National Fish Hatchery and stocked into the Roanoke River Basin every year. Stockings are evaluated by biologists each fall as the juveniles move downstream.

### Fishing Techniques

American shad generally do not feed during their spawning migration, so it has always been a mystery why they will strike shad darts and spoons. Anglers typically fish for American shad on light spinning gear rigged with 4- to 8-pound test line, although increasing numbers of anglers are refining their fly-fishing skills for shad. A favored fishing technique with darts and spoons is to cast upstream along current breaks and retrieve as they sink and drift downstream. For fly-fishing anglers, the fly of choice is often a small Clouser-minnow with a flashy tail. Although many anglers harvest a creel limit of 10 shad, the practice of catch and release is popular.

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## **American Shad** (continued)

### **Good Places to Fish**

The Cape Fear and Tar rivers support an excellent American shad recreational fishery. On the Cape Fear River, three locks and dams are located on the river (near Tarheel, Elizabethtown and Riegelwood) and are choice spots during the spring shad run. Good spots for boat and bank anglers on the Tar River are near Battle Park in Rocky Mount and Bell's Bridge, north of Tarboro.

Although not as abundant as hickory shad, American shad may be caught on the Neuse River at Ferry Bridge near Goldsboro (Wayne County), Anderson Point Park in Raleigh (Wake County) and on the stretch between Wilson's Mills and Clayton.

### **Other Information:**

NCARP Minimum Requirements: 3 pounds or 16 inches

State Record: 7 lbs., 15 oz., from the Tar River on April 10, 1974

World Record: 11 lbs., 4 oz., from the Connecticut River, Mass., May 19, 1986\*

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