

Blueback herring

Alosa aestivalis



The blueback herring is a relatively small schooling fish found in Atlantic coastal waters from Florida to Nova Scotia. Like Atlantic sturgeon and American shad, they are anadromous, living in the ocean as adults and returning to freshwater rivers and streams to spawn. Once an abundant and valuable forage and food fish, their numbers have plummeted throughout their range due to habitat destruction, dams, pollution, ocean bycatch, and the rebound of a major predator, the striped bass. In 2012, Virginia declared it illegal to catch or possess blueback herring, and this moratorium remains in effect today (2017).

Fun Facts

- Native Americans relied on blueback herring and other anadromous fishes for food and as fertilizer for growing corn.
- Herring roe with scrambled eggs and salt herring are two Virginia delicacies that date to the time of English settlers.
- The two most common ‘river herring’, blueback herring and alewives, are almost identical looking but can be told apart by the black lining of the abdominal cavity of the blueback.
- Blueback herring develop spawning marks on their scales, so an experienced eye can count how many times a fish has spawned during its lifetime. The record is 6 times for a 10 year old fish!

