



silver carp

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Common Name	silver carp
Genus & Species	<i>Hypophthalmichthys molitrix</i>
Family	Cyprinidae (minnows and carps)
Order	Cypriniformes (carps, minnows, loaches, suckers)
Class	Actinopterygii (ray-finned fishes)

Diagnosis: The silver carp is characterized by a stout body, large head, massive opercles (gill covers), the head and opercles have no scales, snout bluntly rounded, mouth terminal and appears to be upside down, barbels are absent, and the jaws have no teeth. The eyes are small, located far forward below the angle of the jaw and project downward. Scales are small, cycloid, and cover the entire body. The lateral line is complete with 85-108 scales in series. This fish can weigh up to 60-lbs. The bighead carp may be distinguished from the silver carp by having long thread-like gill rakers, whereas silver carp have sponge like gill rakers. The keeled abdomen of the silver carp extends from the anal vent almost to the base of the head, whereas the keel of the bighead carp extends from the anal vent to the base of the pectoral fins.



Ecology: This fish tends not to spawn in still water or small streams, but in large flood swollen rivers. Spawning occurs after spring rains have flooded the rivers and when the temperature of the water reaches 77°F. Eggs are fertilized externally and need to float downstream. Regarded as a filter-feeder, consuming mainly phytoplankton, this fish is capable of eating between 20 and 120% of its body weight each day. Like all planktivores, they eat from the bottom of the food chain, thusly competing with native planktivores, juvenile fishes and mussels.

Habitat & Distribution: This fish inhabits freshwater riverine systems and confluent lakes, impoundments and reservoirs. Native to several major Pacific drainages in eastern Asia from the Amur River of far eastern Russia south through much of eastern half of China to Pearl River. Its introduced range is worldwide. In the US, it is currently spread throughout the Mississippi River system. In some areas of the Illinois River, where habitat and water quality are severely impaired, they comprise more than 95% of the biomass. Bighead carp were originally imported to the southern United States in the 1970s to help aquaculture and wastewater treatment facilities keep retention ponds clean and to provide fresh fish for human consumption.

Status: Silver carp may be found currently found in small numbers within the Dresden Pool of the Illinois River, where the Kankakee and Des Plaines rivers meet near Channahon, IL. No silver carp have been collected closer to Lake Michigan than the Dresden Pool to date.

USGS Fact Sheets: <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?speciesID=549>