

**The  
Palmyra Cove Nature Park  
And  
Environmental Discovery Center's  
Fishing Guide**



## **Delaware River Fish**

Fish are important indicators of water quality and the health of an ecosystem. The size, number and diversity of fish are all important in determining the overall health of the river. Small fish are an important food source to larger fish and birds. Fish consume many insects and larvae that help keep an ecological balance in the habitats along the river. The river often serves as a nursery to fish before they migrate to the ocean. Fish are an important food source and recreational pursuit. Since the Clean Water Act of 1972, the river has gotten progressively cleaner. However, heavy metals and other toxins still persist in river bottoms. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection offers guidelines on fish consumption because of mercury contamination. Mercury content is particularly high in some bottom dwelling species and is passed up the food chain to larger fish. The Delaware River has seen the return of shad and striped bass migrations that had severely declined in the 1960's due to pollution. Before the 1970's, the major source of water pollution was industrial contaminants. Today, runoff from lawns and sediment caused by soil erosion are the major culprits. We can all help protect the river by reducing the use of lawn chemicals and conserving natural vegetation along streams and rivers. Despite efforts to improve water quality, according to Environmental News Network, 38 percent of our freshwater ecosystems in the United States are unfit for swimming or fishing. We must be diligent in our efforts to promote water quality.

### **Some common fish in the Delaware River**

- Minnows – mainly small fish, have great value as bait fish, the carp fish is actually a minnow which can grow up to 3 feet in length. The Cutlips Minnow is the most common in this area and grows up to 6 inches in length.

- Carp – the largest species of minnow; over 300 different types of carp; carp brought to American from Europe and Asia in the 1870's and 1880's. Carp are bottom feeders and often muddy water so much that plants can not grow. Goldfish are in the same family.
- Catfish – Over 30 species; eat clams, insect larvae, crustaceans and are scavengers. They have long barbels around the mouth and spines on the dorsal and pectoral fins (can sting with fins).
- Eels – Over 140 species in North America. All eels spawn in Atlantic south of Bermuda and migrate up rivers in North America where they mature and then return to the ocean. Each female eel lays about 10 million eggs.
- Shiner – silver greenish color, sometimes in large schools, often food source for larger fish.
- Striped Bass (Striper) – Move into the Delaware River to spawn in May. Adults up to 60 lbs. Eats crabs, other fish and invertebrates.
- White Perch (also in bass family) – lives in brackish and fresh water; important game fish.
- Shad – actually in the herring family; adults average 2 feet in length and weigh 4 lbs; migrate up rivers to spawn in the spring. Young remain in the rivers until fall, then , 2 to 4 inches in length they migrate back to the ocean. Still netted on the Delaware north of Trenton. Numbers declined in the 1960's and 1970's due to pollution. Have recently started to return to Delaware River.
- Largemouth Bass – Has dark stripe on side that disappears as the fish matures. Eats crayfish and other fish. Mouth extends back beyond the eye.
- Smallmouth Bass – Has vertical stripes on sides; mouth does not extend back beyond the eye pupil.
- Sunfish – Many species; easy to catch; bluegill(bluish color on top, orange on bottom), pumpkinseed(more orange on cheeks than bluegill), and crappies(largest sunfish, light yellow color with black spots) are types of sunfish found in the Delaware River.

Palmyra Cove Nature Park is a non-profit organization. Our mission is to provide passive recreation and environmental education. If you are interested in becoming a member, volunteering, or participating in our programs, ask at the desk or contact us by phone or email.

*Palmyra Cove Environmental Education Foundation is a 501 (c) (3), non-profit organization established to preserve habitats and provide environmental education and passive recreational opportunities for all to visit.*

*Events:*

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*Soar with nature at Palmyra Cove Nature Park!*