

SHAD-A Migratory Fish of the Delaware River

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One of the Delaware River's outstanding features is its fish and wildlife resources. I recall biking up the river one spring morning several years ago where I observed a migrating school of thousands of shad so thick that they literally obscured the river bottom.



The American shad (*Alosa sapidissima*) is a large member of the herring family with silvery sides and a row of dark spots that extends back behind the gills. Shad vary in length from 7 - 23 inches, and range in weight from 1 - 8 pounds. They are an anadromous fish species, which means that they live most of their life in the ocean but migrate as far as 200 miles up freshwater rivers and streams on the eastern seaboard to rocky and gravelly shallows where they spawn.

The spawning runs occur in the Delaware River and some of its tributaries during the months of April and May when the water temperature rises above 45 degrees.

Shad put up a great fight and are a fun fish to go for. The best fishing is in the early morning and at dusk. Rig the line with a weighted shad dart or a gold flutter spoon. Cast upstream and let the lure bounce in the current along the bottom, reeling it in as it passes by. Trolling from a boat is another option. The fishing is best when the water is clear, the water temperature is at least 50 degrees and the river is at normal levels or slightly lower. Come on out to Washington Crossing State Park, Bulls Island Recreation Area or just about any place along, or on the Delaware and take your best shot at snagging some of these feisty critters.