

# Atlantic Whitefish

*Coregonus huntsmani*

**STATUS**

Endangered 

Endangered 

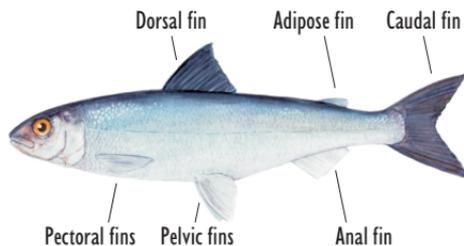
69



© K. BENTHAM, DFO

## Species Description

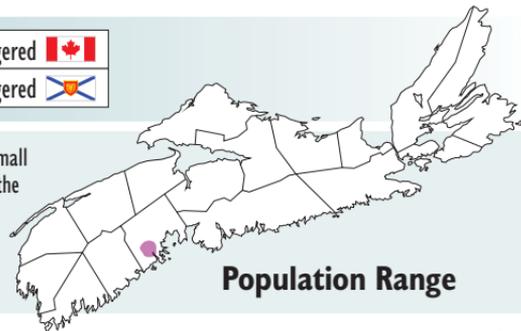
The Atlantic Whitefish has an elongated body, a fleshy adipose fin, and a deeply forked caudal fin (tail). It has a dark green to dark blue back, slightly lighter sides and a silvery white belly. It has dusky dorsal and caudal fins and light pelvic and anal fins. It is typically 20-25 cm long.



© DFO

- Terminal mouth (faces forward at end of snout)
- More than 90 large lateral line scales
- Upper and lower jaws fairly equal in length
- No spots or upper body markings

Throughout the world, a small population occurs only in the Petite Rivière watershed. Considered to be extirpated from the Tusket River, Yarmouth County.



**Population Range**

## Habitat

Until recently, Atlantic Whitefish were confined to three small semi-natural, interconnected lakes (Hebb, Milipsigate and Minamkeak Lakes) as a result of a dam located at the base of the lakes. In 2012, a fishway was constructed at the Hebb Dam in an attempt to restore conditions that allow access to the ocean. In freshwater, this species is found throughout the water column, with adults generally found in cooler, deeper water and juveniles in shallower water.



© MATTHEW RANDALL, BCF



© BCF

Atlantic Whitefish are an anadromous (sea run) fish by nature, which means they are meant to spawn in freshwater then return to the ocean to feed, grow and mature.

## Interesting Points

- The most primitive of all North American whitefishes (oldest evolutionary link).
- **Found nowhere else in the world!**
- Also known as the Acadian, Sault or Round Whitefish.
- Old stories say that Tusket River Atlantic Whitefish were so plentiful they were taken by the truckload and used as fertilizer or lobster bait.
- Prior to their decline, larger bodied sea-run individuals could reach lengths of up to 50 cm.
- Atlantic Whitefish raised in captivity were introduced into a small lake in Dartmouth (Anderson Lake), however it is currently not known whether they have established a population.



© MATTHEW RANDALL, BCAF



Newly constructed fishway

© KIM ROBICHAUD-LEBLANC, DFO

## Similar Species

**Lake Whitefish:** Common, smaller and fewer than 90 lateral scales (on side from head to tail); subterminal mouth (faces downwards).



© NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

## Threats to Survival

- Fish passage barriers impede access to the sea (several dams still exist in the Petite Rivière watershed).
- Unauthorized introduction of invasive alien species (Chain Pickerel, Smallmouth Bass).
- Increased acidification of lake water from acid rain and land-based activities (forestry, agricultural, residential).
- Accidental catch by recreational anglers.



Never move fish from one lake into another



Monitoring migration downstream of the fishway

## How You Can Help

Prevent the introduction of invasive species; it is illegal to move fish from one body of water to another. Fishing Atlantic Whitefish is prohibited. Learn how to identify this species and if accidentally caught, report the sighting to Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation (BCAF). Protect fish habitat on your land by leaving a buffer of trees along the water's edge, and avoid the use of chemicals and fertilizers.

## Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

**Contact:** DFO Species at Risk 1-866-891-0771 or [xmarsara@mar.dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:xmarsara@mar.dfo-mpo.gc.ca), and Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture [inland@novascotia.ca](mailto:inland@novascotia.ca)

**Info:** [www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca), [www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes), <http://novascotia.ca/fish>

**Sighting Reports:** 1-866-727-3447 or [www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings](http://www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings)

**Stewardship:** Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation (902) 634-9977 [www.coastalaction.org](http://www.coastalaction.org)