



Klamath Network Featured Creature

Januar 2014

Green Sturgeon

(*Acipenser medirostris*)

General Description:

The green sturgeon has a striking appearance with a sleek sharklike body, ranging from pale green on the ventral surface to olive green on the dorsal surface, with 5 widely separated rows of bony plates, or scutes, along its body. Its spine continues into the upper lobe of its large, heterocercal tail, giving it an ancient aspect. This is fitting, because the sturgeons, like paddlefishes, are highly successful offshoots of the ancient Chondrostei, which contains the ancestors of all bony fishes.



Photo: Toz Soto, Karuk Tribe Fisheries Dept; from <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Adults have blunt snouts with four barbels extending down in front of the mouth. Their mouths are toothless, but have highly flexible tubelike lips, suiting their foraging in the benthos.

Although the sturgeon class, Acipenseridae, contains the largest freshwater fish in the world, the green sturgeon is relatively small, with females reaching more than 2 meters in length (still less than the white sturgeon (*A. transmontanus*) which can reach 6 meters.

Habitat and Ecology:



From KSWild.org

Green sturgeons are the most oceanic species of sturgeon, entering rivers mainly to spawn.

Juveniles and adults are benthic feeders, though they may also take small fish, such as anchovies. In the San Francisco Bay, juveniles feed on opossum shrimp and amphipods. Adults have been recorded taking sand lances, callinassid shrimp, anchovies, and clams.

Life Cycle:

Green sturgeon are anadromous, similar to salmon. Reproductively mature green sturgeon enter the Klamath-Trinity system between late February and July, where they spawn in deep, fast water. On the Klamath River, Sturgeon Hole is apparently a major spawning site, as leaping and other courtship behaviors are often observed in late spring and early summer. Female sturgeon produce 60,000-140,000 eggs, which are externally fertilized. Juvenile sturgeon migrate downstream, forage in estuarine habitats, and typically assume a marine life stage at 1-3 years and approximately 30-66cm (1-2 ft) in length.

Distribution:

Oceanic green sturgeons are recorded around the northern Pacific Rim from northwest Mexico, Canada, the United States, and Russia (where it is called the Sakhalin sturgeon [and may be a distinct species]). They tend to be most abundant between 40 and 60 degrees north latitude. However, river populations are restricted to between British Columbia and the Sacramento River, and spawning populations are even more limited. Known spawning populations have been in steep regional decline, and it is believed that the spawning populations in the Klamath, Rogue, and Sacramento River may be the *only* remaining in North America.

Conservation status

Green sturgeon are listed by the IUCN as Vulnerable, and are a federally listed Threatened species in the southern portion of its range, and a Species of Concern in the northern portion (including the Klamath and Rogue populations).

Where to Find in the Klamath Network Parks:

One of the last spawning population of Green sturgeon occur in the Klamath River of Redwood National Park.

References and Further Reading:

Moyle, P. 2002. *Inland Fishes of California*. University of California Press. 502 pp.