

The Life Cycle of American Shad

PA's Most Mighty Migratory Fish



The **American shad** belongs to the herring family (Genus: *Alosa*). It is the largest herring in North America and can grow up to about 24 inches and 6 pounds. It ranges along the Atlantic Coast from Florida all the way to Canada. It likes to eat zooplankton, microcrustaceans and small fish.

This fish is quite a traveler and has a very interesting life cycle. It is anadromous (a-'nad-dro-mus), which in Greek means "up-running." In other words, the "anadromous" shad migrates upstream from salt water to fresh water to spawn. The shad enters two rivers in our state by way of the Chesapeake Bay or Delaware Bay. Can you guess which two rivers? See the map of the shad's migration route to find your answer.

Shad make their journey to the rivers in late spring. They spawn at night in shallow areas where the water is moving. One shad can release up to 300,000 eggs! Most shad die after spawning, but some may survive to spawn another day.

After hatching, the little shad fry live in their river nurseries until the next fall, when they start their journey back to the Atlantic Ocean. Check out the life cycle of the shad, **if you think you can keep up!**

