

DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE ?

KNOW THE FACTS

Northern Snakehead

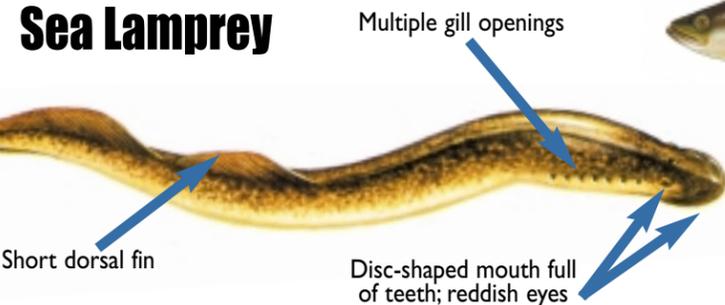


Similar-Appearing Native Species

Bowfin



Sea Lamprey



American Eel



Snakehead Fish

- ◆ As a family, snakeheads are native to parts of Asia and Africa. The northern snakehead is native to China, and possibly Korea and Russia.
- ◆ Typically found in a wide variety of habitats
- ◆ Northern snakeheads grow to a maximum length of about 33 inches
- ◆ Generally tan in appearance, with dark brown mottling; body somewhat elongated; long dorsal fin; jaws contain numerous canine-like teeth (similar to pike or pickerel)
- ◆ Capable of breathing air using an air bladder that works as a primitive lung (not found in most fish)
- ◆ Able to hibernate in cracks and crevices during cold temperatures and to go dormant in the mud during droughts
- ◆ Voracious top-level predator, eating mostly fish, but also eats other aquatic wildlife and frogs
- ◆ Capable of moving short distances on land using its pectoral fins; can live out of water for as many as three days
- ◆ Favored as a food fish throughout southeast Asia; also believed to have curative powers. Also sold in the aquarium trade.
- ◆ Four species have been found in the U.S., in eight states, probably the result of releases from personal aquariums or to develop local food sources
- ◆ No natural predators in the U.S.

Why Should We Care?

Exotic species like snakeheads may have significant impacts in the U.S., including:

- ◆ Impacts to local fish populations through predation or displacement and competition for food; disruption of native aquatic systems
- ◆ Transmission of parasites or diseases, including those affecting humans
- ◆ Potential impacts on local economies dependent on fishing or related resources

What Can You Do?

- ◆ If you find a snakehead fish, kill it and put it on ice, then contact the Department toll-free at **1-800-770-4951**.
- ◆ If you can no longer care for an exotic pet, contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries at (804) 367-1000 or dgifweb@dgif.state.va.us for assistance.

Similar-Appearing Native Fishes

Bowfin

- ◆ In Virginia, native to the Coastal Plain and possibly lower Piedmont; occasionally found in other parts of the state
- ◆ Typically associated with swamps and sluggish open marsh-fringed rivers; found in both shallower and deeper waters in Virginia
- ◆ Grows to a maximum length of about 32 inches
- ◆ Generally tan-olive in appearance, with dark olive reticulation; body somewhat elongated; long dorsal fin; bony scales; jaws contain small canine and peglike teeth; black spot at the base of the tail (more prominent in males)
- ◆ Capable of breathing surface air using an air bladder as a lung (not found in most fish)
- ◆ Able to withstand periodic droughts by going dormant in the mud
- ◆ Nocturnal, but most active at dusk and dawn; predatory generalist eating fish, aquatic invertebrates and frogs

American Eel

- ◆ Native to most of Virginia, as far west as the New River system; not known from southwestern Virginia
- ◆ Typically associated with a range of habitats, including mountain streams, warm lakes, estuaries and the ocean
- ◆ Grows to a maximum length of approximately 40 inches
- ◆ Ranging from olive-brown to yellow-olive to almost black in appearance, with silver sheen on lower side; body very elongated; no pelvic fin; long dorsal and anal fins, converging with the caudal fin to create the appearance of one continuous fin; jaws with small teeth

Sea Lamprey

- ◆ Native to coastal Virginia; migrates to spawn
- ◆ Grows to 12-20 inches in length; eel-like body
- ◆ Circle-shaped mouth full of teeth
- ◆ Dark brown to black backs and light yellow to pale brown bellies; large reddish eyes



If you find a snakehead fish, do NOT release it. Kill the fish, put it on ice, and immediately contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries toll-free at 1-800-770-4951.



For more information, contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries at (804) 367-1000 or visit online at www.dgif.virginia.gov.

Photos: USFWS/D. Raver; USGS/NAS
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