



AMERICAN SHAD

Alosa sapidissima

Description:

- ◆ black spot just behind the gill opening, usually followed by a row of 2 or more smaller, less distinct dark spots
- ◆ upper jaw extends to rear margin of eye
- ◆ silver body with dark green to blue back
- ◆ cheek deeper than it is long

Size:

- ◆ up to 30 inches
- ◆ largest member of the herring family

Range:

- ◆ Atlantic coast from Sand Hill River, Labrador, Canada to St. John's River, Florida

Facts:

- ◆ the Delaware River is the principal spawning area in NJ
- ◆ important food source for people along the river
- ◆ travel in large schools
- ◆ important prey for birds and larger fish

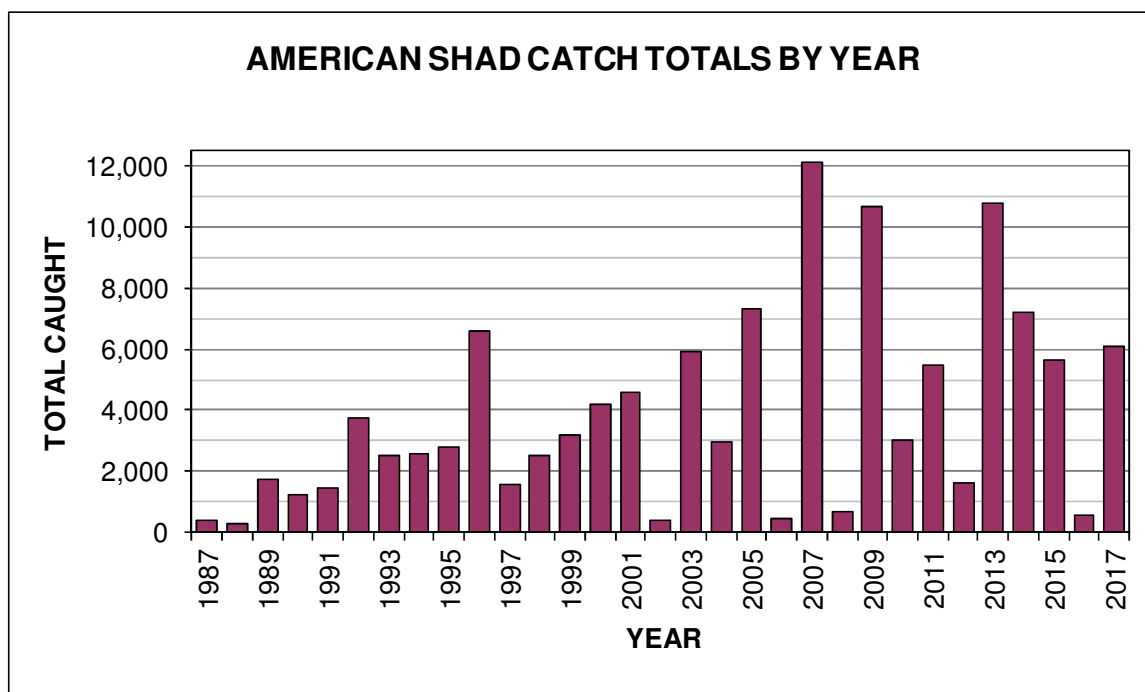
American shad numbers have increased overall since the beginning of the survey. However, during years of severe drought (2002) and severe flooding (2006), catches tend to be lower than normal. The average number of American shad averages dropped from 20 fish per haul in 2001 to one fish per haul in 2002. However, this species is resilient, and bounced back with abundance in alternating years.

Unfortunately, due to the flooding in 2006, American shad population counts dropped to all-time lows of only one per haul. Once again, American shad showed their resiliency in the Delaware River during 2007, with the highest abundance recorded at 37 fish per haul.

In 2012, the average number of American shad caught was the lowest since 2008, with 5 fish per haul. These numbers present a reason to be concerned. Limiting the number of fish that can be harvested is one way to combat these declines.

Effective January 1, 2013, all American shad fisheries (both commercial and recreational), with the exception of the Delaware Bay, Delaware River and its tributaries, were closed (no possession, take or harvest). The recreational possession limit in the Delaware Bay, Delaware River and its tributaries is 3 fish with no minimum size and an open season all year. Commercial net regulations for American shad in the Delaware Bay, Delaware River and its tributaries have remained the same.

In 2013, the average number per haul of American shad increased to 34 fish. While these numbers are not as high as the averages of the 1990's, any increase is a welcome change. With new conservation guidelines in place, hopefully biologists will continue to monitor an increase in both population sizes.



*from 1980 to 1986, the largest catch was 56 fish in 1986

For more information about American shad, please check out this article:

River Herring Status: Research Holds the Key
<https://www.njfishandwildlife.com/pdf/2018/digmar6-13.pdf>

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