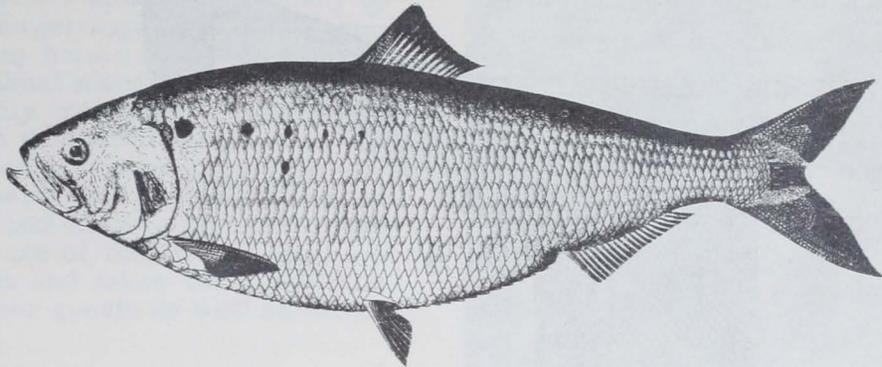


FOOD FISH FACTS



AMERICAN SHAD
(*Alosa sapidissima*)

Shad, a springtime favorite for hundreds of years, was known as elft, the eleven fish, to the early Dutch settlers. It was on the 11th day of March each year that the first shad were caught and cooked on a plank, a method the settlers learned from the Indians. Shad were so abundant in colonial days and the first days of the Republic, that it became unfashionable among some of the well-to-do. Many of them ate shad on the sly, fearing that others would think them unable to afford more expensive foods. Many prominent people, however, put aside their pride and enjoyed shad openly. George Washington was among the latter and history reveals that he was especially fond of baked shad. Shad became the excuse for parties in Washington, and senators and representatives often sailed down the Potomac on Saturday mornings for the sole purpose of eating shad and enjoying a few drinks.

Description

Shad are members of a large family of fish which includes the herring. Shad is the largest member of this family, reaching up to 14 pounds in weight, and up to 30 inches in length. Shad caught today, however, rarely reach over 9 pounds in weight. Silvery colored with a bluish-green metallic luster on the back, shad have a deep body and a serrated midline on the belly side. Their scales are large and easily loosened. Unlike the sea herring, shad do not have teeth on the roof of the mouth; however, young shad do have small teeth in the jaws which may last until they are a foot or more in length. Shad are distinguished from other

members of the herring family by having a prominent dark spot behind the gills, followed by a row of lighter spots, a deeply forked tail, and the adults are toothless.

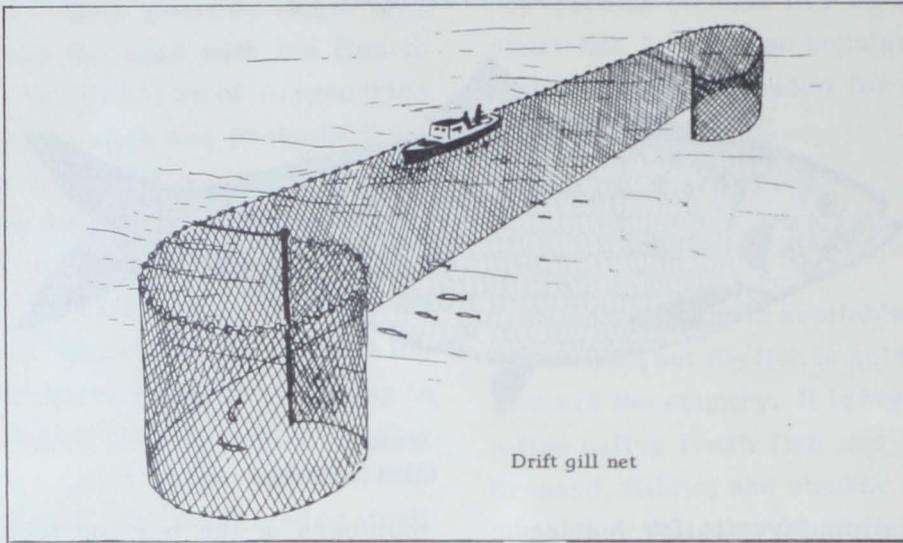
Habitat

Shad are native to the Atlantic and can be found from the Gulf of St. Lawrence down the coast to Florida along the Gulf of Mexico. They are most abundant, however, from North Carolina to Connecticut. In 1871, shad were successfully planted in the Sacramento River in California, and shortly afterwards, in the Columbia River. Now they occur along the Pacific coast from the Mexican border to Alaska. Plantings in inland lakes and streams were unsuccessful.

Shad are anadromous, like salmon, spending most of their lives in the ocean but returning to their natal streams to spawn. Young shad spend their first summer in the stream where they were hatched. When they are 3 to 6 inches long, they migrate to the ocean, remaining there until they mature. At approximately 3 to 4 years of age, shad return to their natal stream to spawn. Spawning occurs in January in warmer waters and up until June in colder waters. For reasons still unknown, shad that spawn in coastal streams of the South Atlantic States die after spawning, while those that spawn further north survive and return again the next year.

Shad Fishing

Shad was an important food for the Indians long before the first settlers arrived. The Indians used many methods to catch the shad,



Drift gill net

including bush nets or seines, weirs, spears, and bows and arrows. Early settlers used weirs, drift gill nets, dip nets, and haul seines. The haul seines were the most efficient and most often used. Gear today remains essentially the same but the techniques and net materials have changed. Shad has become very popular as a prized game fish in recent years, jumping out of the water frequently, striking hard, and giving the fishermen a game fight. Although shad have decreased in quantity, they are still available in sufficient numbers to support fisheries of great commercial and recreational values.

Management and Conservation

Several states along the Atlantic coast have worked independently and jointly with the NMFS in investigating shad resources. The studies made were primarily to acquire basic knowledge of the species and, through scientific management, to increase the size of the shad run and the annual yield. Shad populations in several rivers are being effectively

managed as a result of these studies. Primary problems facing the Service and the fishing industry are pollution, overfishing, and dams on rivers which prevent shad from making their spawning runs. All fishery research, whether state or federal, has a basic goal to ensure the wise use of a renewable resource.

Uses of Shad

Fresh shad are available from January into June and can be bought either whole, drawn, or filleted. Shad have a large, complicated bone structure and, for ease of eating, may be boned at the seafood market. The texture of the flesh is delicate and it is best to leave the skin on while cooking. This tasty fish can be broiled, baked, planked, stuffed, or sautéed. Shad roe is considered a great delicacy by gourmets, and can be bought either fresh or canned. (National Marketing Services Office, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, 100 East Ohio St., Rm. 526, Chicago, Ill. 60611.)