

# The FISHES

## of LAKE MICHIGAN



Coho Salmon

"The Fishes of Lake Michigan" is the Museum's Summer Journey for children during June, July and August. On a self-guided tour, youngsters will be introduced to some of the different fishes found in the lake, with an emphasis on the changes in the abundance and species composition of the fish populations.

There have been many changes in the fish life of Lake Michigan in the last century. The Lake Sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*), once abundant in the lake, is now rare, while other fishes have been introduced into Lake Michigan, either by accident or deliberately.

about 1921. Gradually moving into the other Great Lakes, it appeared for the first time in Lake Michigan in 1936. Since that time it has practically wiped out the Lake Trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*), once the foundation of the lake's commercial fishing industry.

About this time, when the Lake Trout and other fishes were decreasing in number, the Alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*) moved into the lake. This fish is also found along the Atlantic Coast and since 1873 has been in Lake Ontario, where it was probably stocked by accident. Using the Welland Canal route, it moved into Lake Erie about 1931



Rainbow Trout



Sea Lamprey



Alewife



Lake Sturgeon

Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) were introduced into the lake before the turn of the century, flourished, and have provided commercial fisherman with catches as high as 7,000,000 pounds in one year. Goldfish (*Carassius auratus*) first escaped into the lake from lagoons where they were stocked for the 1893 Columbian Exposition. They were introduced many times later by fishermen and by people who simply released their pet fish in the lake.

American Smelt (*Osmerus mordax*) eggs were planted in Crystal Lake, Michigan, in 1912. These hatched and the fish lived and spawned in that lake, escaping through an outlet into Lake Michigan about 1923.

Rainbow Trout (*Salmo gairdneri*) were stocked in the lake and streams of northern Wisconsin and Michigan that empty into the lake. This fish is also called the Steelhead. Other fishes extended their ranges and invaded Lake Michigan from the lower Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. In the past, Niagara Falls was a natural barrier between Lakes Ontario and Erie. Construction of the Welland Canal, completed in 1829 and enlarged about 80-90 years later, allowed ships from Lake Ontario to pass into Lake Erie. Fishes also used this canal for passage between the lakes.

The Sea Lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*) lived along the Atlantic Coast and was also found in Lake Ontario. It moved through the Welland Canal and into Lake Erie

and was first found in Lake Michigan in 1949. With few fishes to eat it or compete with it, the Alewife thrived and became abundant.

A control program has lowered the number of lampreys in the lake and with the lampreys under control, populations of other predator fish could make a comeback. To aid in building the populations of game fish in Lake Michigan Lake Trout and Rainbow Trout have been stocked in large numbers.

In 1966, the State of Michigan released Coho Salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) in streams that empty into the lake. This native of the Pacific Coast will not only help in improving sport fishing in the lake, but will also aid in Alewife control. The trout and salmon stocking may also help to restore the lake's commercial fishing industry.

The future for the fishes in Lake Michigan is difficult to predict. Lamprey populations will probably remain under control. Alewives will probably still be abundant, but with a restoration of predators and the establishment of a commercial fishery for them, their numbers should decrease.

Journey sheets and information on this program are available at either the North or South Doors and at the Information Desk. This is Journey No. 54 in the Raymond Foundation's Journey Program for Children.





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