



bighead carp

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Common Name	bighead carp
Genus & Species	<i>Hypophthalmichthys nobilis</i>
Family	Cyprinidae (minnows and carps)
Order	Cypriniformes (carps, minnows, loaches, suckers)
Class	Actinopterygii (ray-finned fishes)

Diagnosis: The bighead carp is characterized by a stout body, large head, massive opercles (gill covers), the head and opercles have no scales, snout bluntly rounded, mouth terminal and appears to be upside down, barbels are absent, and the jaws have no teeth. The eyes are small, located far forward below the angle of the jaw and project downward. Scales are small, cycloid, and cover the entire body. The lateral line is



complete with 95-120 scales in series. This fish can weigh up to 100-lbs. The bighead carp may be distinguished from the silver carp by having long thread-like gill rakers, whereas silver carp have sponge like gill rakers. The keeled abdomen of the silver carp extends from the anal vent almost to the base of the head, whereas the keel of the bighead carp extends from the anal vent to the base of the pectoral fins.

Ecology: This fish tends not to spawn in still water or small streams, but in large flood swollen rivers. Spawning occurs after spring rains have flooded the rivers and when the temperature of the water reaches 77°F. Eggs are fertilized externally and need to float downstream. Regarded as a filter-feeder, consuming mainly zooplankton, this fish is capable of eating between 20 and 120% of its body weight each day. Like all planktivores, they eat from the bottom of the food chain, thusly competing with native planktivores, juvenile fishes and mussels.

Habitat & Distribution: This fish inhabits freshwater riverine systems and confluent lakes, impoundments and reservoirs. Native to several major Pacific drainages in eastern Asia from the Amur River of far eastern Russia south through much of eastern half of China to Pearl River. Its introduced range is worldwide. In the US, it is currently spread throughout the Mississippi River system. In some areas of the Illinois River, where habitat and water quality are severely impaired, they comprise more than 95% of the biomass. Bighead carp were originally imported to the southern United States in the 1970s to help aquaculture and wastewater treatment facilities keep retention ponds clean and to provide fresh fish for human consumption.

Status: Bighead carp are found throughout the Illinois River basin, with highest population abundances in the lower reaches. In the upper reaches, they are found as far north (in low abundance) within the Dresden Pool of the Illinois River, where the Kankakee and Des Plaines rivers meet near Channahon, IL. One Bighead carp has been collected from Lake Calumet, to date, but it is uncertain of how the fish was dispersed to this location.

USGS Fact Sheet: <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.aspx?SpeciesID=551>