

## ASIAN CARP: Bighead and Silver on the Move

Four species of carp native to Asia (grass, black, bighead and silver) have been introduced into North America. Among these Asian carp, the bighead and silver have gained recent notoriety. Both species have established large populations and impacted native fishes in the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. They are now moving north toward Lake Michigan. If they enter the lake, thus penetrating the electrical fish barrier installed in the Chicago Sanitary and Shipping Canal (or are introduced by some other means), they could have tremendous negative impacts on the already troubled Great Lakes ecosystem.

Bighead (*Hypophthalmichthys nobilis*) and silver (*H. molitrix*) carp were introduced from Asia to North America in the early 1970s when the aquaculture industry imported the fish to improve water quality in fish-rearing ponds. By the early 1980s, bighead and silver carp had escaped into open waters and have since had increasingly negative impacts on several large-river ecosystems. Consuming large amounts of phytoplankton, zooplankton and aquatic insects, these fish compete directly with native adult fishes (e.g., paddlefish and gizzard shad), all larval and juvenile fishes and native mussels.



Bighead Carp



Adult bighead and silver carp are easily distinguished from other fishes. Both fish are large and deep-bodied with a protruding lower lip. Their eyes are located far forward and appear to look down. As the name implies, bighead have an extremely large head. Bigheads are typically dark gray along the dorsal (top) region, with an off-white underside and blackish blotches

throughout. They have a ventral (belly) keel that extends from the anus forward to the pelvic fin base; their long, close-set gill rakers (situated on top of and a bit forward of the gills) appear comb-like. In contrast, silver carp have a much smaller head. They are mostly silver with olive coloring along the sides and back. Their ventral keel extends from the base of the anal fin to the base of the gills. Their gill rakers are fused into a sponge-like plate, which allows them to remove smaller particles from the water column.

You can help prevent the spread of these Asian carp to the Great Lakes:

- Spread the word to anglers about the danger of moving live fish from one location to another. *Transporting fish from one side of the barrier to the other would defeat its purpose.*
- Never use wild-caught baitfish in or release fish into a water body unless they came out of that body of water. *Juvenile Asian carp are difficult to distinguish from some native baitfish species*
- Report any tagged carp that are caught. *Fish tagged for a study of the barrier's effectiveness have tags that say "Do Not Consume" and contact information.*

For further information on Asian carp or other aquatic exotic species, contact Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant at 847-872-8677, [charlebo@uiuc.edu](mailto:charlebo@uiuc.edu), or visit our website at [www.iisgcp.org](http://www.iisgcp.org).