

ATLANTIC Tarpon

Megalops atlanticus

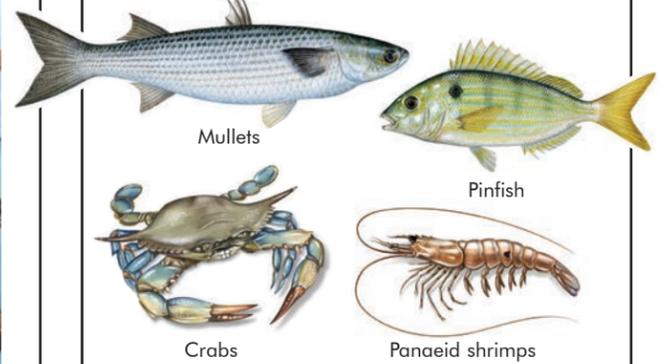
Tarpon are prized sportfish, but their populations may be declining. They are slow-growing fish whose populations may be unable to keep up with fishing pressure and habitat degradation. Tarpon live in freshwater rivers, brackish estuaries, and the open ocean. They use all of these habitats to complete their life cycle.

Tarpon diets change as they grow and mature. Larvae feed on microplankton.

Juvenile Diet

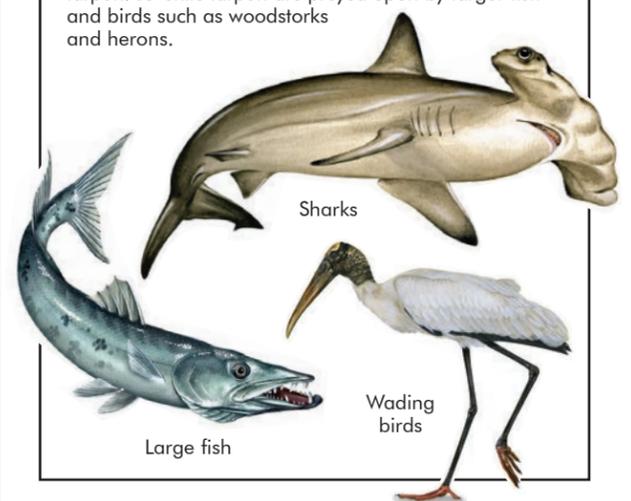


Adult Diet



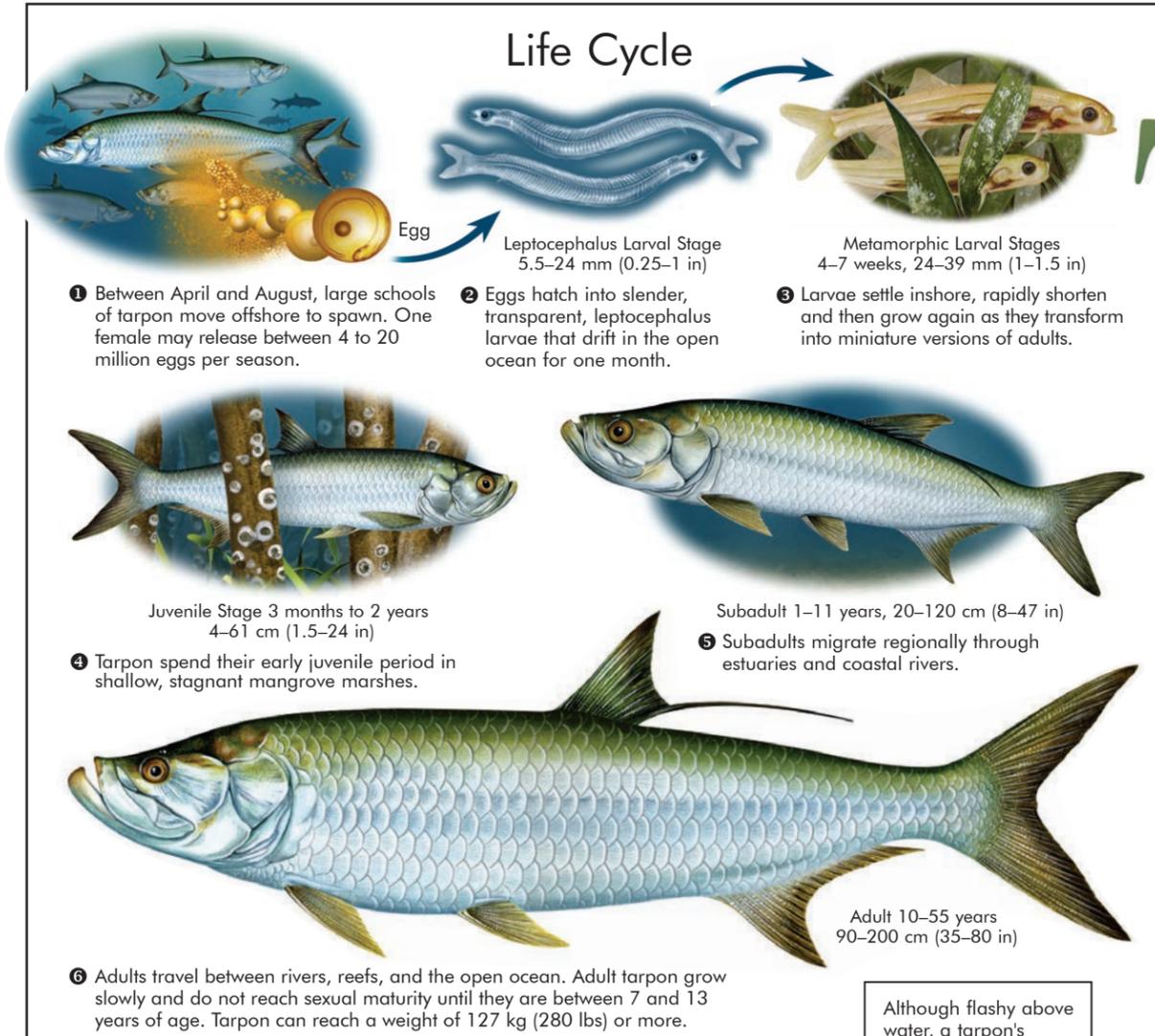
Natural Predators

Sharks and humans are the main predators of adult tarpon. Juvenile tarpon are preyed upon by larger fish and birds such as woodstorks and herons.



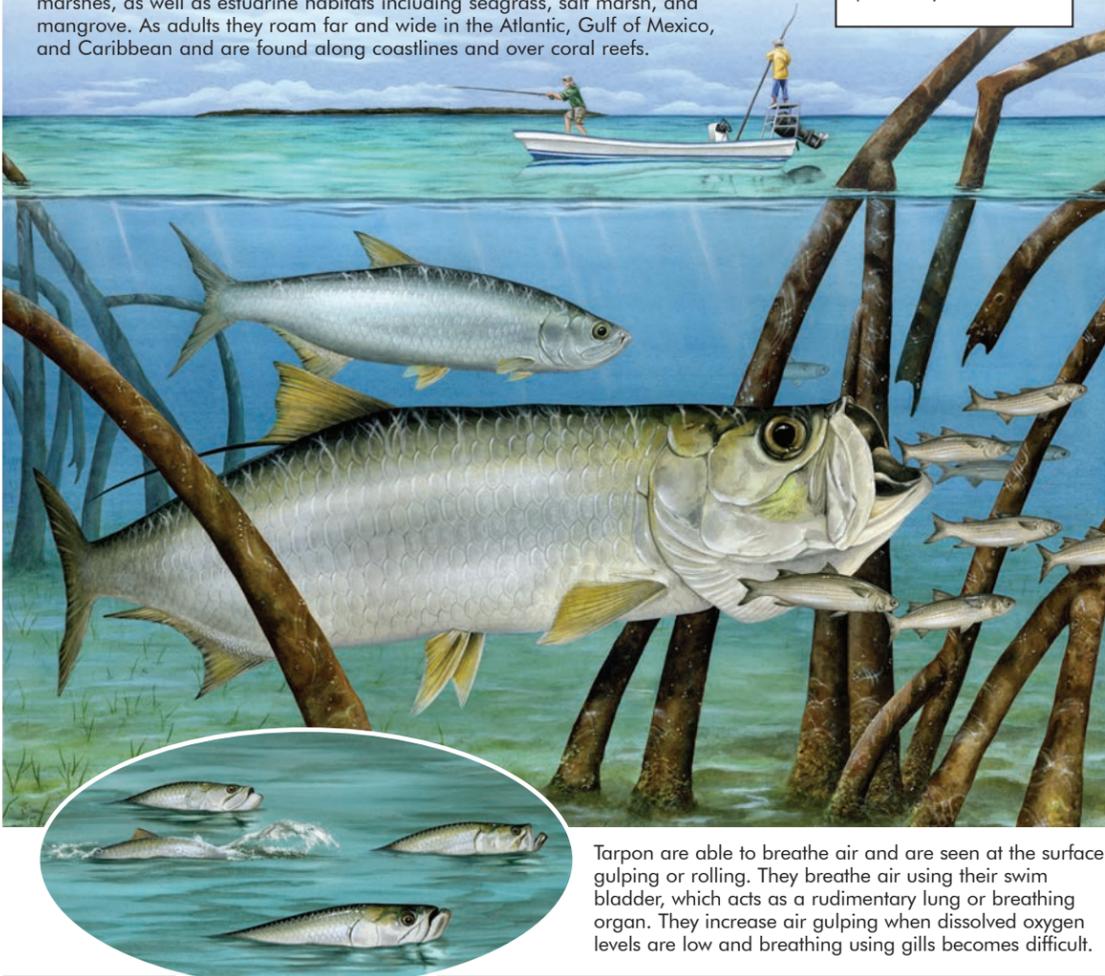
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Life Cycle



Habitat

Tarpon are found far upstream in the freshwater portions of rivers and marshes, as well as estuarine habitats including seagrass, salt marsh, and mangrove. As adults they roam far and wide in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean and are found along coastlines and over coral reefs.



Ecological and Economic Significance

With its large size and supreme ability to fight and jump, tarpon are a prized catch-and-release fish. Because they have bony flesh and often have ciguatera (a poison that builds up in the tissue of some fish), tarpon are seldom used as food. Mortality from

recreational fishing and diminishing habitats may have caused significant declines. Assessing tarpon populations is difficult because of their wide range throughout the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean and their complex life cycle.

How You Can Help

- Use circle hooks to prevent "gut-hooking" during catch-and-release fishing
- Handle fish gently with wet hands and never through the gills
- Avoid taking fish out of the water
- Release fish where predators are not present and only when the fish is able to swim on its own
- Protect and prevent damage to mangroves and seagrasses

