

# Silver Carp

*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*

## Iowa Aquatic Invasive Species Fact Sheet

**Description:** Silver carp are large, deep-bodied, fish reaching a maximum size of about 40 inches and 60 pounds. The sides of the body are uniformly silver in color with a white to silvery-white belly. The scales are very small, resembling



trout scales. Silver carp have large heads with large, upturned mouths without teeth. The eyes are located far forward on the head and project somewhat downward.

**Distribution:** Silver carp are native to large rivers in eastern Asia. They were first brought to the United States by an Arkansas fish farmer in 1973 for plankton control in ponds and as a food fish. By 1981, they were discovered in natural waters in Arkansas, likely the result of escape from aquaculture facilities. Silver carp are spreading rapidly throughout the rivers of the Mississippi River Basin and have been reported from at 12 twelve states. They were first recorded in Iowa in 2003 from the Des Moines River but are also known to inhabit the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

**Threats:** The impact of silver carp in the United States is not adequately known. Silver carp eat phytoplankton microscopic algae and plankton and can compete for food with young larval and juvenile native fishes, adult paddlefish, bigmouth buffalo and gizzard shad, and native mussels. In numbers, the silver carp has the potential to cause enormous damage to native species because it feeds on plankton required by larval fish and native mussels. This species is also a competitor with adults of some native fishes, for instance, gizzard shad, which also rely on plankton for food. Silver carp also pose a threat to boaters because of their leaping ability. When the fish feel vibration from a boat, they jump out of the water ten or more feet into the air. Since these fish can reach 60 pounds, this can be a dangerous situation if a fish were to hit a boater. High densities, large sizes, and fast growth rates pose a risk of competition for food supplies with native fishes.

**Control:** To help control the spread and introduction of silver carp, become more informed about the spread of non-native species nationwide. Consult your local, state, and federal conservation authorities as to the threat of non-native species in your area, and to the laws and regulations governing the importation, culture, maintenance, and stocking of non-native species. Utilize care in the purchase and use of baitfish in lakes and streams. Ask your bait dealers where their baitfish originates from, and never release any unused baitfish into the water; always destroy them or return them to your bait dealer. Support your local, state and federal natural resources agencies in all of their efforts to stop the spread of non-native species of any kind.

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**Law:** Iowa law makes it illegal to 1) possess, introduce, purchase, sell, propagate, or transport aquatic invasive species in Iowa, 2) place a trailer or launch a watercraft with aquatic invasive species attached in public waters, and 3) operate a watercraft in a marked aquatic invasive species infestation. The scheduled fine is \$500 for violating any of the above regulations. The law also requires the DNR to identify waterbodies infested with aquatic invasive species and post signs alerting boaters. The DNR may restrict boating, fishing, swimming, and trapping in infested waters. Not approved aquaculture species.

