# SILVER CARP

## Invasive Species

### Quick Stats:

**Average Length -** 25 to 33 inches
**Average Weight -** 3 to 12 pounds, but Missouri specimens over 25 pounds have been captured
**Lifespan -** up to 20 years

*A Silver Carp on its side. Silver Carp are distinct because of their silvery scales, their low-positioned eyes, and their sponge-like gills.*

**Identification:** Silver Carp are silver when they are younger and slowly turn greenish on the back with age. They retain their silver underside. They are quickly recognizable by their small silvery scales.

Along with their namesake color, they can be identified by the positioning of the eyes and mouth. Their eyes are low on the head, in line with the mouth, and can point slightly down, while the mouth is oriented slightly upwards.

Silver Carp have a keel that runs from the anal fin to the head, whereas the similar bighead carp keel only runs from the anal fin to the pelvic fins. The gills on the front of the first gill arch are fused, making them spongelike in appearance.

**Habitat:** After their accidental introduction into the wild, Silver Carp live in medium to large sized rivers, from the Meramec River to the Missouri River, as well as throughout the Missouri River Basin. They prefer non-flowing or slow moving water except when spawning, when they prefer fast, highly turbulent water.

**Reproduction:** In the United States, male Silver Carp tend to reach sexual maturity around the age of two years. Females reach sexual maturity around three years. A large, healthy female can lay around five million eggs a year.

**Diet:** Silver Carp are filter feeders, which means they constantly filter water through their mouths to separate and eat plankton from the water.

**Reasons for Invasive Status:** Silver Carp are native to eastern Asia, but were imported to the

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United States in 1973, primarily as a biological water quality control mechanism in fish hatcheries to clean up excess plankton in the water. The fish were also stocked in various other locations, such as sewage treatment facilities, for the same reasons. The fish escaped these impoundments during flood events, and were introduced into the free-flowing rivers, such as the Missouri River, where they flourished and spread.

These fish are so successful because they eat a lot of plankton, competing directly with native planktivores, such as Paddlefish and Gizzard Shad. Since plankton form the base of any aquatic food chain, they can also affect an entire ecosystem, therefore food can run out or be reduced for all animals and the whole ecosystem suffers as a result. Their presence is often linked to the decline of native species with similar feeding habits and with fish with early life stages that compete with adult Silver Carp. In addition, the sounds of boat motors or paddles slapping water can disturb Silver Carp and cause them to leap from the water as high as ten feet into the air.

## Sources:


"Silver Carp." Missouri Department of Conservation. Retrieved from https://nature.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/silver-carp

"Silver Carp." United States Geological Survey. Retrieved from https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.aspx?speciesID=549


**For More Information:** This is issue number 4 in volume I of issues all related to the Missouri River. To access the rest of the collection, visit the Missouri River Relief Education page at riverrelief.org. This issue was published in June 2018.