

Bighead Carp Fact Sheet

Genus, species: *Hypophthalmichthys nobilis* (Richardson 1845).

Common Names: Bighead carp, Tongsan (Thai).

Taxonomic Synonyms: *Aristichthys nobilis* (Richardson 1845); *Leuciscus nobilis* (Richardson 1845).



Riecks 2003

Bighead carp are restricted in many states because of their tolerance to survive in many habitat types, and their ability to decrease phytoplankton (algae) and zooplankton populations, thereby competing with native fish. The concern is that the bighead carp will reach the Great Lakes where recreational and commercial fish feed on zooplankton at some stage in their life history. The species is a common food fish around the world, and grows quite large, up to longer than 1 meter.

Life History: Bighead carp can grow to lengths more than 1 meter and can grow to weigh as much as 40 kilograms (USGS 2005).

Means and Time of Introduction: Bighead carp was first introduced in the United States in Arkansas in 1972 for the purpose of controlling algae in ponds. During flooding in 1994 bighead carp escaped from aquaculture farms and spread throughout the Mississippi basin including to the north. It is likely that bighead carp spread to the Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois, and Ohio Rivers (USGS 2005). Media reports indicate that the introduction of bighead carp to the Great Lakes area is most likely the result of cultural practices where people release live carp to waterways (ISSG 2005).

Origin: Bighead carp are originally from China, and can be found in large populations in many rivers there, including the Yangtze and Han Rivers (USGS 2005).

North American Distribution: Today bighead carp are reproducing in populations all along the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio Rivers. Specimens have been reported in states as far reaching as California, Minnesota, and Florida.

Habitat: Bighead carp can occasionally tolerate salinities in the range of 6-12 parts per thousand. The preferred temperature for reproduction is about 25°C, the maximum temperature in which bighead carp can survive is 38 °C (USGS 2005). Bighead carp can survive temperatures down to nearly freezing, on the order of 1°C. (ISSG 2005). Typically found in large rivers, bighead carp can also be found in smaller rivers and streams, as well as lakes and ponds (USGS 2005). Bighead carp are known to only spawn in moving water (ISSG 2005).

Ecological Impacts: Bighead carp were introduced because of their ability to decrease phytoplankton (algae) density in ponds although zooplankton are preferred food (USGS 2005).

Economic Impacts: As of 1995, the bighead carp was ranked fourth in worldwide production with a total of 2.8 billion pounds produced in that year (ISSG 2005). The species is commonly seen in live food fish markets in the northeast.

Special Notes: In various states, regulations prohibit the introduction of non-sterile bighead carp, or require permits (ISSG 2005). Some states prohibit the sale of any live bighead carp. Currently efforts are underway to build an electric barrier to prevent carp, including the bighead carp from entering the Great Lakes. For additional information on risk assessments of Asian carp see listings in additional references.

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