

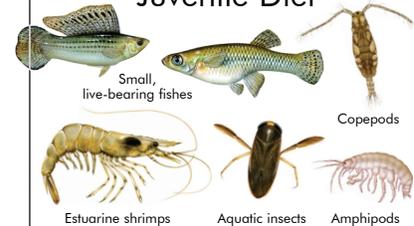
# ATLANTIC Tarpon

## *Megalops atlanticus*

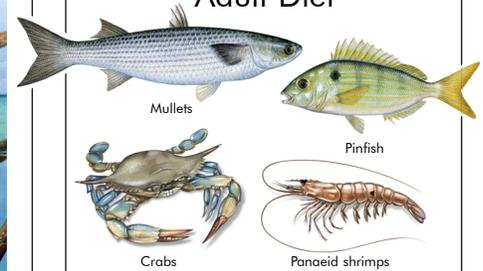
Tarpon are prized sportfish, but have declined in abundance. They are slow-growing fish whose populations may be unable to keep up with fishing pressure and habitat degradation. Tarpon live in freshwater rivers, brackish estuaries, and the open ocean. They use all of these habitats to complete their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

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

### Juvenile Diet

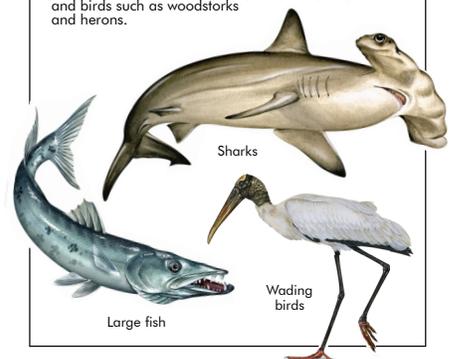


### Adult Diet



### Natural Predators

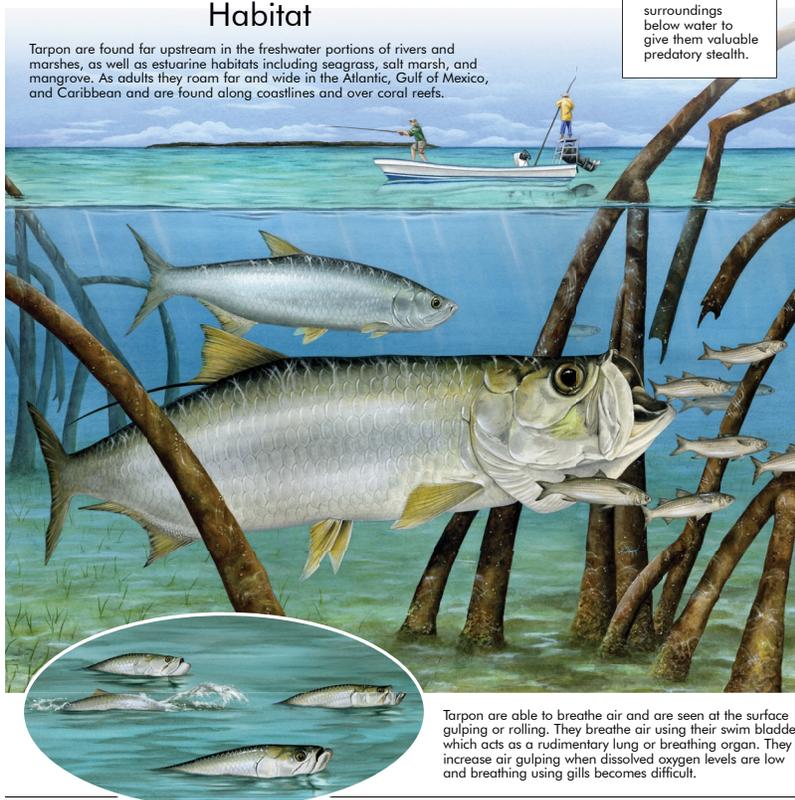
Sharks and humans are the main predators of adult tarpon. Juvenile tarpon are preyed upon by larger fish and birds such as woodstorks and herons.



## 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.

Although flashy above water, a tarpon's silvery scales mirror their surroundings below water to give them valuable predatory stealth.



Tarpon are able to breathe air and are seen at the surface gulping or rolling. They breathe air using their swim bladder, which acts as a rudimentary lung or breathing organ. They increase air gulping when dissolved oxygen levels are low and breathing using gills becomes difficult.

## 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 keeping fish out of water for a long periods
- Release fish where predators are not present and only when the fish is able to swim on its own
- Avoid damaging mangroves and seagrasses



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