

NORTHERN SNAKEHEAD

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Department of
Environmental
Conservation

What are northern snakeheads?

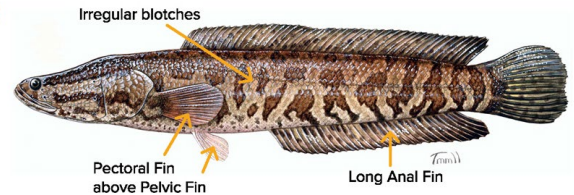
Northern snakeheads are predatory fish native to Asia. They were most likely introduced to New York through aquarium dumping and accidental, as well as intentional, releases from fish markets. It is crucial that we stop the spread of this invasive predator to protect the health of our waters, wildlife and fishing industry.

Identification

Northern snakeheads are long, thin fish with a single fin running the length of the back. They are generally brown with large, dark blotches along their sides and can grow up to three feet long. They have a somewhat flattened head and a large mouth with many teeth. Northern snakeheads are very similar to our native bowfin (*Amia calva*), which can most easily be distinguished from snakeheads by a shorter anal fin and a rounded tail fin.

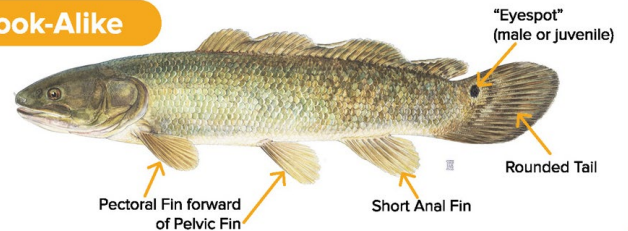
Invasive

Northern Snakehead



Native Look-Alike

Native Bowfin



Snakehead image: Susan Trammell, Bowfin image: Ellen Edmundson

Where are they located?

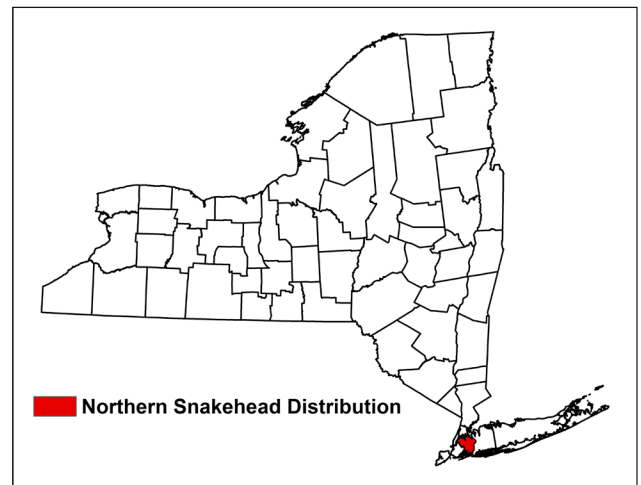
Although this species prefers to live in stagnant shallow ponds or swamps, it can inhabit any of our canals, reservoirs, lakes, and rivers. In New York State, snakeheads were identified in two connected ponds in Queens where steps have been taken to keep the population contained. Another population found in Ridgebury Lake in the town of Wawayanda, Orange County, was eradicated in 2008 using the pesticide rotenone.

How do snakeheads spread to new areas?

Besides aquarium dumping and fish market releases, people also contribute to their spread by illegally using them as bait or unknowingly transporting juveniles in water-containing compartments of boats. Snakeheads will also spread to nearby waterbodies on their own since they can breathe air and survive for days out of water.

How can they impact me?

Northern snakehead juveniles feed on a wide variety of microscopic organisms, insect larvae, and crustaceans on which native fish rely. As adults, they feed mostly on other fish species, but also eat crustaceans, reptiles, mammals and small birds. Snakeheads have the potential to reduce or even eliminate native fish populations and alter aquatic communities. Municipalities which rely on tourist dollars from recreational fishing may suffer losses should northern snakeheads continue to invade New York waters.



What is being done?

Northern snakeheads are federally listed as “Injurious Wildlife”, meaning they may not be imported or transported between states without a permit. The New York State Part 575 Invasive Species Regulation takes this a step further by prohibiting the possession, sale and transport of live snakeheads in the state.

What are the tools for management?

The best method for dealing with northern snakeheads is preventing their spread and establishment. Once they are in an area however, there is little that can be done to control and manage them. Trap nets, electrofishing and pesticides like rotenone may be used on a case-by-case basis depending on the population size and whether the infested waterbody is connected to other waterbodies.



What can I do?

- Learn how to identify northern snakehead.
- Dispose of aquarium animals and plants in the garbage, not in waterbodies.
- Dispose of all bait in trash cans, at disposal stations, or above the waterline on dry land. Note: It is illegal to use snakehead as bait in NY.
- Dump water from boat compartments, bait buckets, and live wells on dry land.



Northern snakehead in an aquarium
Wikicommons

If you believe you have caught a northern snakehead...

- DO NOT RELEASE IT.
- Kill it immediately and freeze it.
- If possible, take pictures of the fish, including close ups of its mouth, fins and tail.
- Note where it was caught (waterbody, landmarks or GPS coordinates).
- Report it to your regional DEC fisheries office (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7927.html>) or to DEC's Invasive Species Bureau (see below).
- You can also submit a report through iMapinvasives at www.nyimainvasives.org.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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