

Silver Lamprey in the St. Clair System

In addition to the exotic and destructive sea lamprey, Michigan's waters support populations of 4 native lamprey species. The Great Lakes and connecting waters of southeast Michigan are home to an abundant population of silver lamprey (*Ichthyomyzon unicuspis*). These parasites prey on many of the fish species present in Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River, including carp, drum, redhorse suckers, channel catfish, smallmouth bass, yellow perch, and walleye. The favorite prey for silver lamprey in Lake St. Clair are muskie and lake sturgeon, probably because they are large and have soft scales or lack scales. These lamprey attach to their hosts and rasp their skin enough to obtain nutrition from seeping blood. However, anglers need not be alarmed about silver lamprey populations in the waters of southeast Michigan. Silver lamprey have co-habited and co-evolved through thousands of years with lake sturgeon, muskie, smallmouth bass, and walleye. As a result, silver lamprey parasitism does not negatively affect the abundance of important sport fish species in these waters.

A typical adult silver lamprey from Lake St. Clair.

