



## An Old Friend

Today is a perfect day for fishing—you could say fishing for a friend. Ron and David are sitting quietly on the edge of Wolf River ... waiting ... watching ... for Sally. She is an old friend of Ron's, and he is anxious for David to meet her. David has brought his cameras because he plans to capture Sally on film. They hope Sally will be arriving soon.

The men's eyes dart over the water's surface looking for ripples and dark shadows. Ron Bruch knows what to look for because he has been to the river before. In fact it is his favourite place to meet Sally. He is a biologist and the most important part of his job is to keep Lake Sturgeon, like Sally, from disappearing completely from the Great Lakes.

This is David Lickley's first time to Wolf River, here in north-east Wisconsin, where the river drains into Lake Michigan. Before he came he did lots of research on the subject of sturgeon, the Great Lakes and its ecosystem. That is because he wants to make an IMAX® film for Science North called, *Mysteries of the Great Lakes*.

Suddenly a giant silvery body shoots out of the water like a torpedo then lands with a resounding splash. It is Sally leaping up to greet Ron. He jumps into the river and wraps his arms around her thick armour-plated torso. Then he struggles to help her writhing seven foot (2.13 m), 270 pound (122 kg) body to shore. The pain shooting up his legs reminds him what a beating his knees take whenever he visits with Sally.

David is busy with his camera, eagerly taking pictures of the biologist and the giant bottom-feeder. He watches as Ron checks Sally's bar code ID and then measures and weighs her. What David finds most fascinating is the way Ron mas-

sages the ancient fish in a special way that stimulates her to release her eggs.

Sally has laid many eggs in her lifetime. Every four or five years she returns to Wolf River to spawn. She was born here around 1880, shortly after Canada became a country. The Lakes were quieter then and there was more wildlife, more forests and no large cities. But over the years people built cities, and then water dams to provide power for them. Then steam ships and freighters soon brought danger, noise, pollution and invasive species that made it difficult for Sally and her kind to live in the Lakes.

Even though David had prepared himself, he is still surprised at Sally's strange and almost frightening appearance. Despite her somewhat shark-like features he also knows that she is considered by many to be a great friend of the Great Lakes. That is because Sally's ancestors have been on Earth since the Upper Cretaceous period, about 136 million years ago. That was the same time when dinosaurs were at the height of their development. Today sturgeon are the oldest and largest freshwater fish in North America and that is what makes Sally one of the mysteries and wonders of the Great Lakes.

Sally has lived in the Great Lakes for a very long time. Even after all the pollution, introduction of invasive species and

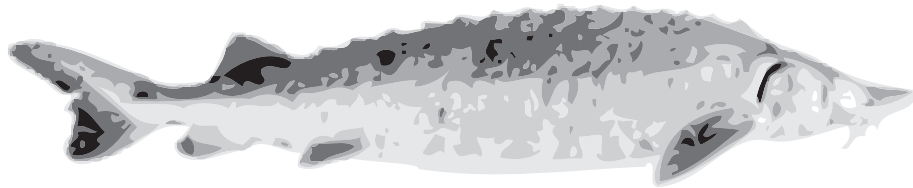
other alterations to her ecosystem Sally has lived for more than 120 years. There may even be older female sturgeon in the Lakes. That is because females are capable of living for as much as 150 years. That is not the case for male sturgeon though—they generally only live for about 55 years and are a lot smaller than females too.

Ron wants to help revive the sturgeon population in the Great Lakes. So he will take the eggs Sally has given him back to a laboratory where they will be safe from predators. When they have hatched and the juvenile fish are big enough they will be released back into Wolf River to become the next generation of Lake Sturgeon.

After their short visit Ron helps Sally back into the river. He and David watch as Sally drifts off with the current, heading for the place where she will lay the rest of her eggs—thousands and thousands of them. Now Ron and David return to the shore and relax on the river bank, happy about their visit with their great friend in the Great Lakes. Yes, it certainly has been a perfect day for fishing.



## Lake Sturgeon Factsheet



### Appearance

The sturgeon is called a living fossil because it first appeared about 136 million years ago. It looks like a prehistoric fish because it's been around since the time when dinosaurs roamed the Earth. There are 29 different species around the world; five are native to North America. A sturgeon has:

- a torpedo-shaped body
- a shark-like tail fin
- no teeth, it sucks up food from the floor of the lake
- cartilage skeleton
- white belly
- olive brown or grey upperbody
- 1 dorsal fin
- rows of protective armour plates, called scutes, instead of scales
- four whisker-like feelers called barbels, near the mouth, used to find food

### Range

Found in a freshwater environment that includes the Mississippi, Lake Michigan, Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario drainage basins.

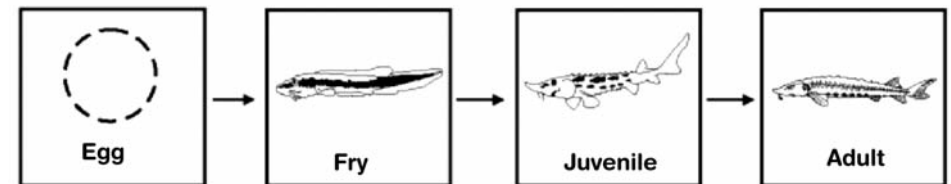
### Diet

Lake Sturgeon are omnivores. They eat snails, insect larvae, leeches, small clams, other invertebrates and plants.

### Size

Females are bigger than males: females: 7 ft. (2.13 m.) and up to 270 lbs (122 kg); males: 5–6 ft. (1.85 m.) and up to 150 lbs (68 kg).

### Reproduction



- sturgeon lay eggs
- females lay 4,000 to 7,000 eggs per pound (8,800 to 15,400 eggs per kg) of body weight
- lay their eggs in rocky shoals of streams, freshwater
- female sturgeon mature at about 24 years; males mature at about 15 years
- male life span—up to 55 years; female life span—80 to 150 years





2. Name your four favourite animals and estimate their size and weight.

a) \_\_\_\_\_ b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_ d) \_\_\_\_\_

3. How many of each of your favourite animal would it take to be as long/tall as Sally Sturgeon. Add your favourite animals to your bar graph.

a) \_\_\_\_\_ b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_ d) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What have you learned from your bar graph?

---

---

---

---