

Northern Snakehead Frequently Asked Questions General Information



What are Northern Snakeheads? Northern snakehead (*Channa argus*) is a species of predatory fish native to southeast Asia. Maryland, neighboring states, and the United States Fish & Wildlife Service categorize them as invasive, injurious, or nuisance..

Are they dangerous to humans? No. There's no evidence of attacks on humans by northern snakehead. They have very sharp teeth and can grow to become large creatures. As such, they may cause injury if handled improperly.

Is there evidence to suggest they're a problem? Yes. Research is ongoing, but there is data to support multiple negative impacts. Snakeheads eat other organisms and in some cases, can cause declines in relative abundance of their prey populations. Snakeheads also carry pathogens, such as largemouth bass virus and mycobacterium, which can be harmful to other fishes.

Where can they be found in Maryland? Northern snakehead can now be found throughout the Chesapeake Bay. Larger concentrations can be found in the Potomac River as well as Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and many surrounding rivers.

Is it too late to stop them from spreading? No. While northern snakehead are well established in affected areas, their spread can be slowed into non-tidal waters within the Chesapeake Bay watershed and hopefully prevented elsewhere.

What do snakehead eat? Their diet varies. Like many predators in the animal kingdom, snakehead are opportunistic feeders. Different habitats will offer different prey options but there is evidence of predation upon white and yellow perch, bluegill, catfish, amphibians, crustaceans like crawfish - and even small mammals.

Can snakehead walk on land? No. Snakeheads lack the required skeleton for walking. They can squirm and wiggle, and in some cases cross land in only inches of water. But there's no evidence of intentional locomotion out of water and onto land.

Can snakeheads breathe air or live out of water? Yes. Snakehead can respire oxygen and live out of water provided their skin remains moist. In some cases, that can be several days or longer.

Do snakehead breed multiple times a year? Yes. Snakeheads have been observed spawning two or more times a year.

What risk do northern snakehead pose to native fish species?

Significant. To support rapid growth, top predators like northern snakehead must consume a significant amount of energy. Ongoing research suggest that snakeheads can reduce abundance of their prey, such as white and yellow perch.