

Journey of the Atlantic Salmon

Life Cycle in Lake Ontario

1. Eggs: In the fall, eggs are deposited in shallow gravel nests, called redds, made by female salmon using their powerful tails. Once fertilized, the eggs are covered for protection.

2. Alevin: Newly hatched from eggs, alevin stay hidden in the gravel using their yolk sac as fuel.

3. Fry: When spring arrives, fry emerge from the gravel, ready to start eating small prey like aquatic insects.

4. Parr: A young salmon with vertical lines called "parr marks". They will stay in the river at this stage for one or more years.

5. Smolt: Losing their parr marks and turning a silvery color, a smolt continues to grow as it swims downstream to Lake Ontario. A smolt will imprint to natural chemical signals in the river water, which it will use to find its way back as an adult.

6. Adult: An adult will mature in Lake Ontario until it is ready to follow the chemical signals in the river water to return to its birthplace to spawn. An Atlantic salmon may reproduce several times during its lifetime.



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Atlantic salmon are Lake Ontario's only native species of salmon. They are culturally significant to the many Indigenous communities in the region. The lake is thought to have once held the world's largest population of freshwater Atlantic salmon. This population declined rapidly after European colonization, and by the late 1800s, they were extirpated (locally extinct) from Lake Ontario. Restoration efforts currently aim to create a recreational fishery and increase the possibility of having a population of Atlantic salmon that can reproduce on their own in the wild.