

HISTORICALLY PRESENT IN LAKE GEORGE, ROUND WHITEFISH ARE ALSO KNOWN AS FROSTFISH

# ROUND WHITEFISH

Round whitefish (*Prosopium cylindraceum*), also known as the frostfish, were historically present in the waters of Lake George. It is currently unknown if this species can still be found in the deep parts of the lake. Whitefish populations have declined due to the introduction of non-native species such as the smelt, largemouth bass and other species, along with the alterations of spawning habitats.

Whitefish are endangered and are now protected from harvest and possession by the NYS Endangered Species Law. In 1990, only nine lakes in New York State had verified populations of round whitefish, including five in the Adirondack Park.

Historically, many lakes in the Adirondacks contained whitefish. Lakes had natural populations or were stocked with this important prey species. Stocking took place between 1886 and 1904. In 1900, it was believed that 84 - 90 lakes in New York had documented



Whitefish is a protected and endangered species in New York. In 1990, very few lakes in New York contained populations of whitefish.

whitefish populations. It is believed that over-fishing, stocking of non-native predator species, climate change, siltation of spawning grounds and the failed stocking attempts of whitefish have led to the decline of the species across the Adirondacks and in Lake George.

While Lake George has adequate habitat for the whitefish, it has too many warm water predator species that feed on and outcompete the whitefish. Silt impairment is also an issue. It has been documented that less than 4% of eggs will survive due to being eaten by

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po box 352, lake george, ny 12845 · (518) 668-9700  
[info@fundforlakegeorge.org](mailto:info@fundforlakegeorge.org)  
[fundforlakegeorge.org](http://fundforlakegeorge.org)



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po box 591, lake george, ny 12845 · (518) 668-5913  
[info@lakegeorgewaterkeeper.org](mailto:info@lakegeorgewaterkeeper.org)  
[lakegeorgewaterkeeper.org](http://lakegeorgewaterkeeper.org)

# Round Whitefish

## LAKE GEORGE FACT SHEET

predators. In bodies of water that contain rainbow smelt, up to 100% of larval whitefish will be eaten. Historically whitefish were an important food item for lake trout and landlocked salmon.

The round whitefish have a distinctive torpedo-like shape, elongated body, with a moderately forked caudal fin. They are generally dark olive gray or brownish above to silvery white on the sides and belly. Like other salmonids (relatives of salmon and trout), they have an adipose fin. Whitefish can be found in deep, cold lakes at an average depth of 150 feet. Both sexes mature at age three to four years when they are between 12-13 inches in length. The maximum-recorded size was 22 inches. The maximum age is 13 years. Juveniles have spots and parr marks on their sides. Round whitefish are bottom feeders; eating insects, mollusks, crustaceans, smaller fish and fish eggs.

Spawning takes place between November and December, over gravel bottoms in waters up to 48 feet deep. Adults will usually swim in pairs and will not feed while on the spawning grounds. During spawning time both sexes will grow tubercles on their bodies. Eggs



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will be laid over the gravel to drift down into the cracks between rocks. Eggs are 3.3-4.6mm in diameter. Females can lay a little over 9,500 eggs. Hatching takes place in 140 days when water temperatures reach 36 degrees. Whitefish can grow to 4.3 inches in their first summer.

For additional information on fishing regulations in New York State please visit the website of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)).

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