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Striped Bass Parasite in Georgia



Have you seen parasites in the mouths of striped bass recently caught on some Georgia lakes and rivers? What you are seeing is likely a parasitic copepod of the genus *Achtheres*. *Achtheres* infects the gills of freshwater fish and is easily visible when it matures and moves into the fish's mouth and gill arches. Mature adults resemble a tiny white dot (less than 1/8") with what resembles legs. Those 'legs' are actually the egg sacs of the female parasite. This parasite does not pose a human health risk. The parasite is not found in the flesh of the host fish and is destroyed through cooking.

The schooling nature of Striped Bass and the abundance of young parasites released by adult *Achtheres* can lead to a high fish infection rate. Once introduced, *Achtheres* will infect nearly all Striped Bass in a lake. It has also been seen in other fish species, including Largemouth Bass.

TWRA biologists first documented *Achtheres* in Striped Bass populations in the Tennessee Reservoirs, Watts Barr and Tims Ford, in 2000. The range of the parasite has since expanded to Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Georgia.

In Georgia, *Achtheres* have been found in the lakes listed below, but have not directly caused a fish kill in these waters.

- 2017 Lake Lanier - Striped Bass and Largemouth Bass
- 2017 Lake Russell - Striped Bass
- 2017 Clarks Hill Lake - Striped Bass
- 2017 Savannah River below Clarks Hill Lake - Striped Bass
- 2018 Lake Hartwell – Striped Bass
- 2018 West Point – Striped Bass
- 2019 Bartlett’s Ferry – Striped Bass
- 2020 Lake Allatoona – Striped Bass

These parasites should not harm healthy fish, but in Georgia biologists think that heavy infestations could further stress fish as water temperatures rise during the summer months and result in some mortality. The only case of significant Striped Bass mortality associated with *Achtheres* occurred in 2003 at Smith Mountain Lake, Virginia. The large striped bass that died had already been stressed by overpopulation and a lack of forage in that reservoir.

Georgia Wildlife Resources Division (GAWRD) fisheries biologists are monitoring freshwater fish populations through a regular sampling program. In addition, anglers are encouraged to report sightings of the parasite in any water body not listed above or in any fish species other than Striped Bass or Largemouth Bass. Reports and photographs of *Achtheres* should be forwarded to the nearest GAWRD Fisheries region office:

<http://www.eregulations.com/georgia/fishing/contact-information-offices/>

What can anglers do to help stop the spread of this parasite in Georgia?

- Do not move live or dead fish between waterbodies - which is unlawful under Georgia law.
- Drain water from gear, boat, bilge, motor and livewell by removing drain plug and opening all water draining devices away from the boat ramp.
- Dry everything at least five (5) days before going to other waters and landings or spray/rinse recreation equipment with high pressure and/or hot water (120 degrees F or higher).