



Delta Discovery

Connecting Classrooms to Nature at the
Nueces Delta Preserve

Spotlight on a Species

Fact sheets discussing species found on the Nueces Delta Preserve

Tarpon



Fast Facts:

Scientific name:
Megalops atlanticus

Common names: *Atlantic tarpon,*
silver king

Habitat: *coastal waters, bays &*
estuaries. Can tolerate a range of
salinities and low oxygen

Fun fact: *The oldest tarpon in*
captivity lived to be 63 years old.

Tarpon are a popular sport fish that are found on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. They prefer coastal bays and estuaries- but can be found offshore. They grow up to 8 feet in length and can weigh 280 pounds. Tarpon feed on smaller fishes such as mullet, mollies and snook- as well as crabs and insects.

It is believed that tarpon spawn offshore and their larva develop inshore. Newly hatched tarpon are transparent and only one inch long. A large female tarpon can lay up to 12 million eggs at once. It takes tarpon 7-13 years to become fecund.

Tarpon are obligate air breathers meaning that their gas bladder is connected to the esophagus and can act as a lung. When tarpon are in low oxygen water, they are capable of breathing air at the surface. Tarpon have even been known to survive in rivers and freshwater lakes.

Texas Parks and Wildlife has recently set up a Tarpon Observation Network for fisherman to report tarpon sightings. Their numbers have decreased since the eighties and nineties, although the exact reason for this is unclear. It is believed that river pollution and sedimentation as well as changing freshwater due to dams may have caused the decline. River mouths are important habitat for the juvenile tarpon.

The tarpon is also the fish in the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program logo. Port Aransas, TX is known for the Tarpon Inn and studying the current numbers was one of the initial projects of CBBEP.

Sources for Further Reading:

<http://myfwc.com/research/saltwater/tarpon/information/facts/>

http://www.sms.si.edu/irlspec/Megalo_atlant.htm

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/maps/gis/ris/tarpon/index.phtml>