

Lampreys: Friends or Foes?

That toothy mouth may look troubling, but most lampreys are not harmful.

Let's look at the facts!

1 There are **40 known species** of lampreys living worldwide! Lampreys can be found in fresh and salt waters from the Arctic to just offshore of Antarctica. Most lampreys are valued ecologically and culturally.

2 Of all the lamprey species, only sea lamprey have established outside their native range, which is the Atlantic Ocean and its tributaries.

Their non-native range is restricted to the Great Lakes basin and Lake Champlain.

3 Lampreys help their native ecosystems while burrowing as larvae by aerating sediments and creating small-scale habitats for aquatic insects. Some lampreys also infuse lake- or ocean-derived nutrients into river ecosystems when they die after spawning.

4 Only about half of the lamprey species worldwide are parasites of fish.

None of the parasitic lampreys living in their native ranges are harmful to fish populations due to long periods of coexistence and co-adaptions with their fish hosts.

5 Because they have not co-existed, **non-native sea lamprey in the Great Lakes basin and Lake Champlain often kill their fish hosts.** Each sea lamprey is capable of destroying up to 40 pounds of fish during its lifetime. Fishery managers control these sea lamprey.

6 So, are lampreys friends or foes?

All are friends except for non-native sea lamprey in the Great Lakes basin and Lake Champlain. Conservation efforts for lampreys in their native ranges are critical for the survival of these incredible creatures!

Help protect lampreys in their native ranges and control non-native sea lamprey in the Great Lakes basin and Lake Champlain by sharing what you've learned.

Learn more about lampreys:

SeaLamprey.org
PacificLamprey.org



Photos: Pacific lamprey (top) - David Herasimtschuk/Freshwaters Illustrated, Northern brook lamprey (center) - Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Five lampreys in the Great Lakes (top-down, left-right): Sea lamprey, American brook, Chestnut, Silver, Northern brook - Great Lakes Fishery Commission