

Walleye in Onondaga Lake



- **Scientific Name:** *Sander vitreus* recently changed from *Stizostedion vitreum*.
- **Habitat:** Prefer large, clear, cool waterbodies with gravel and sandy substrate.
- **Spawning Time:** Early spring, usually just after ice-out.
- **Spawning Locations:** Do not presently reproduce in Onondaga Lake or its tributaries. In other lakes they spawn on gravel areas in tributaries or wind swept gravel shoals in lakes.
- **Age at Maturity:** Male walleye reach sexual maturity in two to four years, while females reach sexual maturity in three to five years.
- **Spawning Behavior:** The female randomly broadcast eggs, then two or more males that swim alongside the female, fertilize the eggs. The eggs are very adhesive, sticking to one another and to objects they touch for the first hour or two. Water then hardens the external egg membrane, and the adhesive qualities are lost. After the eggs are deposited no parental care is given.
- **Number of Young Produced:** A single female can produce from 35,000 to 600,000 eggs that are 0.24 to 0.34 inches in diameter. A 17-inch female will produce about 40,000 eggs.
- **Larval Characteristics:** Incubation is from five days to two weeks. Upon hatching walleye larvae are 0.24 to 0.34 inches long and have not yet developed paired fins, thus their movement is restricted to vertical swimming. In lakes, walleye fry probably move into open water until a length of 1 inch or more and then move into shallower water. After the yolk-sac has been absorbed, walleye fry feed first on plankton crustaceans, then on insect larvae. Young switch to a diet of fish by the time they are three inches long.
- **Life Span:** May live up to 20 years.
- **Size in Onondaga Lake:** Walleye in Onondaga Lake are generally large because there are few young fish in the lake due to a lack of natural reproduction. The smallest walleye in Onondaga Lake are about 16 inches long. A typical walleye in Onondaga Lake is about 22 inches long. Recently a 31.5 inch 11 pound walleye was captured during a monitoring survey conducted by Onondaga County.