Celebrate spring with an alewife adventure!

Maine’s annual spring alewife migration is inspiring. We created a map to help you find locations to witness this natural wonder.

We recommend using a mapping program like Google Maps, with the local information included here. In many instances you can see a fish ladder or dam in Google Maps, satellite view.

Alewives are anadromous (sea-run) fish that spend the majority of their lives at sea but return to freshwater to spawn. Alewives (also known as river herring) are guided by their sense of smell to migrate upstream from the ocean to rivers, streams, ponds and lakes to spawn. Runs generally occur between May 15 to June 15 depending on water temps and river flows.

Pilgrims were taught by Native Americans to put a fish in the ground as fertilizer when planting corn. Those fish were very likely alewives. Back then nearly every stream would have been swarming with alewives just as the planting season arrived. When dams were built to power the industrial revolution alewife runs were decimated. Today because of many substantial efforts to remove dams and install fish ladders, alewives are returning to Maine rivers by the millions. Rebounding numbers of alewives mean more food for the creatures that eat them—striped bass, bluefish, tuna, cod, haddock, halibut, American eel, rainbow trout, brown trout, landlocked salmon, smallmouth bass, pickerel, pike, white and yellow perch, seabirds, bald eagles, osprey, great blue heron, cormorants, seals, whales, otter, mink, fox, raccoon, fisher, and turtles.

A single female alewife can lay 60,000-100,000 eggs, but as few as three may survive to adulthood. Adults make their way back to the ocean after spawning, and many return the following spring to spawn again.

Commercial harvesting rights are held by towns where there are sustainable runs of alewives. The harvest can generate substantial income for a town, and it is often used for the maintenance of fishways and dams. Harvested alewives are sold for lobster bait. To get a permit the town must show that a run is sustainable by doing annual fish counts and taking scale samples to age fish. If a site has a harvest the word harvest is listed here as with the day and time.

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from other locations to Pleasant Pond above the dam and a small run does return to the base of the dam each year. Before dams, this stream hosted millions of alewives making their way to the lakes and ponds that feed the stream. Read about the book Alewives by Douglas Watts for many interesting alewife tales and check out ‘Upstream’ on Facebook about learning about Cobbossee’s fish passage.

**Seven Mile Brook** 
Webber Pond & Vassalboro

Alewives have had access to Webber Pond since the removal of Edwards Dam and the construction of a fish ladder at the Webber Pond Dam. This is a great place to see a medium size run and has good access. There is a boat ramp and small parking lot at the dam where visitors can watch the alewives ascend the ladder into the pond. Take Route 147 north from Augusta to Webber Pond Dam. Turn right and follow Webber Pond Road to Dam Road and the dam. The harvest typically is Sunday through Wednesday in the mornings.

**China Lake Outlet Stream** 
Vassalboro

A small run of alewives are now able to make their way safely to China Lake. Visit the new Box Mill fishway at Old Millick Place, 932 Main Street, Vassalboro.

**Castine**

Take U.S. Hwy 1 to George Wright Road to Hummingbird Drive or enter Hummingbird Drive, Woolwich. In your GPS system, Hummingbird Drive is a short, narrow dirt road marked at the entrance by two concrete columns but limited parking at the dam. You may park along George Wright Road. The river is tidal up to the dam so visit high tide. Kennebec Estuary Land Trust volunteers count fish keennebecestu.org/fish-counting. Harvest is Thursday through Sunday, near high tide.

**Damariscotta River**

Obervation Sites 2022

A historic fish ladder along this river has been restored and provides fantastic spots to watch the large alewife run. In 2019 the escapement of alewives into Damariscotta Lake was over 1 million fish. The website https://damariscottafish.org/ has good background information about alewives, the fish ladder restoration, great photographs and good directions to the site. The Ladder Restoration Festival typically takes place in May. Damariscotta Mills is located a few miles north of the town of Damariscotta. To get there if you are heading north on Route 1 take the Damariscotta exit to business Route 1. Go straight at the 4-way stop just past the Congregational Church. Take Route 729 north for approximately 1½ miles. Look for a parking area just past the Austin Road on the left. Or, take the next left into the Fish House parking lot. From the fish house, follow the path behind the building: the harvesting area is ahead on the left and the fish ladder maker’s truck is toward the right. The harvest takes place twice daily Monday through Friday, once at 5:00 AM and again at 3:00 PM.

**Mousam River** 
Kennebunk

Alewives and shad can’t make their way past the first dam in the Mousam River, located next to Route 1 in Kennebunk, but in the spring they can swim up the Kennebec dam by walking down the river from the park adjacent to Route 1. Bring your underwater camera.

**Presumpscot River** 
Mill Brook & Highland Lake

The Presumpscot River Regional Land Trust’s Mill Brook Preserve provides a trail system along Mill Brook stream to see alewives migrating upstream to Highland Lake. It can be difficult to see alewives underwater so use polarized sun glasses and search for places like riffles that concentrate the fish. Viewing is possible from bridge on Duck Pond Road. The best spots are two pools in Mill Brook labeled on the map at https://www.prl.org/mill-brook-preserve.

**Nequassett Stream** 
Nequassett Lake & Woolwich

Alewives in Nequassett Lake have a home to a historic run of alewives into Nequassett Lake. The Nequassett fish ladder was restored in 2013. With active harvesting operation at the fish ladder visitors can at times purchase smoked alewives. Take U.S. Hwy 1 to George Wright Road to Hummingbird Drive or enter Hummingbird Drive, Woolwich, ME in your GPS system. Hummingbird Drive is a short, narrow dirt road marked at the entrance by two concrete columns but limited parking at the dam. You may park along George Wright Road. The river is tidal up to the dam so visit high tide. Kennebec Estuary Land Trust volunteers count fish keennebecestu.org/fish-counting. Harvest is Thursday through Sunday, near high tide.

**Androscoggin River** 
Brunswick

The Androscoggin River in Brunswick Dam, a large hydroelectric dam located behind Fort Androscoggin Dam has a see-through panel allowing visitors to watch the fish pass over the dam before they are trucked upstream to reproduce. In spring 2018, May 1st until early June, Wednesday-Sunday from 10:00 to 5:00 PM

**Cobbosseecontee Stream**

Pleasant Pond & Gardiner

This fish migration is blocked by a small, privately owned tilt dam about one mile upstream from where the stream flows into the Kennebec. It is often possible to view the alewives just below the dam, using the trail on the Hannah Avenue side of the stream. The Maine Department of Marine Resources has trucked alewives through the dam and a small run does return to the base of the dam each year. Before dams, this stream hosted millions of alewives making their way to the lakes and ponds that feed the stream. Read about the book Alewives by Douglas Watts for many interesting alewife tales and check out ‘Upstream’ on Facebook about learning about Cobbossee’s fish passage.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Penobscot River</td>
<td>Pushaw Lake &amp; Old Town: This large run of alewives migrates up the Penobscot River past Bangor and Orrono to Pushaw Stream and Pushaw Lake. Fish congregate below the fishway at the low dam that sets the lake level at the end of the stream. The site is about ½ miles from the I-95 exit on Stillwater Ave in Orrono, main campus of the University of Maine. From the I-95 exit go to Benncoh Road then turn left onto Kirkland Rd, then Black Brook from the Bagaduce. A e wheel drive, high clearance vehicle may be required to traverse this road or you can easily walk to the dam. The dam and fishway are visible on Google map, satellite view.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somes Stream</td>
<td>Somes Pond Somesville (Mt Desert Island)</td>
<td>Alewives travel out of Somes Harbor and into Somes Pond Halo called Somesville Mill Pond in Mount Desert each year. After observation of the fishways on the stream, alewives can now again be seen traveling into the pond. Parking is located at the Historical Society Museum, where there is an interpretive sign explaining the fish ladders. MHS: <a href="http://www.downeastfisheries.com/site/andalldams">www.downeastfisheries.com/site/andalldams</a> maine mill pond/</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Machias River</td>
<td>Gardiner Lake East Machias</td>
<td>Alewives travel out of Machias Bay into the river to the dam at the outlet of Gardiner Lake. The dam has a fishway where the alewives can’t be viewed. There is also a unique harvest here. The fishway enters the lake next to a small beach. Since the fishway doesn’t have a pen, nets are strung out around the beach to trap the alewives and once enough are enclosed, the nets are pulled to the beach. From Highway 1 take Chasie Mills road to the dam. A boat parking lot and road is located just past the dam. This is a medium size run.</td>
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<td>Maine Rivers</td>
<td>Dismaision</td>
<td>Information is provided here with no guarantees of accuracy. Any actions you take are strictly at your own risk. Please be mindful if crossing private property. But we’d love to hear from you! Please contact <a href="mailto:info@mainerivers.org">info@mainerivers.org</a> with recommendations or corrections. <a href="http://www.mainrivers.org">www.mainrivers.org</a></td>
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