

Sturgeon (Medicine Wheel)

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The **Sturgeon** holds **23 July to 22 August**, and the site's tooltip calls it the ancient king fish of depth, endurance, and quiet command. The placement is **Sun Bear** and **Wabun Wind's**, from *The Medicine Wheel: Earth Astrology* (Prentice-Hall, **1980**), and it is that book's construction — its Author's Note states plainly that the system does not conform to "any way of gaining self-knowledge used by any particular tribe in the United States."

In Sun Bear's system

The book names this the **Ripe Berries Moon**, keeps it in the south under **Shawnode**, and gives it the **Thunderbird clan** — fire. Plant: **raspberry**. Mineral: **garnet and iron**. Colour: **red**. The book's, throughout.

The sturgeon in real traditions

For the **Menominee** the lake sturgeon is not one animal among many. It is spoken of as the **father** of the Menominee, and it holds a spiritual as well as an economic place — among other things as **protector of the wild rice**. The nation's own name for itself is **Mamaceqtaw**, "the people"; "Menominee" comes from the Ojibwe *manoominii*, "wild rice people," and rice and sturgeon are both still served at annual feasts. Menominee descent is **patrilineal**.

One point needs a hedge rather than a flourish. A **Menominee Sturgeon Clan** is often cited, but the nation's five principal clans are usually given as Bear, Eagle, Wolf, Crane and Moose, and the Sturgeon Clan claim rests on thin sourcing. Menominee clan organisation has principal clans with numerous subordinate ones, so the two statements are not necessarily in conflict — but this page will not assert the clan as settled fact.

The **Ojibwe** word for sturgeon is **name**, and it is a *doodem*: at **Red Lake**, *Name* is recorded as a minority clan alongside the principal seven. Anishinaabe living in the sturgeon-rich **Winnipeg River** watershed were known during the fur trade as the "Sturgeon Indians." Fishing was done with spear, weir and net, and more rarely hook and line. Sturgeon were taken for meat, for roe, and for **isinglass** — the swim-bladder gelatine used traditionally as a paint adhesive and later traded to Europeans.

The recent history is a dam story. Two structures built on the upper **Wolf River** in the late 1800s, the **Shawano Dam** and the **Balsam Row Dam**, cut the sturgeon off from their historic spawning grounds at **Keshena Falls** on the Menominee Reservation. Beginning in **2012**, the Menominee and the Wisconsin DNR ran a capture-and-relocation programme to put mature fish back above the dams, and to establish a breeding population in Legend Lake.

Key dates

Date	Event
c. 3200 BCE	The Majorville cairn and medicine wheel, Alberta — 28 spokes, dated by artefact stratification
pre-contact	The Bighorn wheel, Wyoming — 28 spokes, seven cairns, no established construction date

late 1800s	The Shawano and Balsam Row dams cut the Wolf River sturgeon off from Keshena Falls
1879–1900	Great Lakes commercial sturgeon harvest averages 4 million lb a year ; Lake Erie alone yields over 5 million lb in one year before collapsing
1883	The US Code of Indian Offenses outlaws the Sun Dance and "the usual practices of the medicine man"
1884–95	Canada's Indian Act amendments ban the potlatch, then ceremonies involving "wounding or mutilation"
1903	First regulated sturgeon spearing season on Lake Winnebago, with an eight-pound limit; S. C. Simms surveys Bighorn the same year
1915–31	All sturgeon spearing is banned on Lake Winnebago
1951	Canada's ceremonial prohibitions are repealed
c. 1970	Sun Bear forms the Bear Tribe (<i>date widely repeated, not firmly sourced</i>)
1974	Eddy's <i>Science</i> paper on Bighorn; Schaefer (1986) finds no statistical support for the stellar alignments
11 Aug 1978	The American Indian Religious Freedom Act is signed
1980	Sun Bear and Wabun Wind, <i>The Medicine Wheel: Earth Astrology</i> — where this placement comes from
1984	The AIM Southwest chapter resolution names Sun Bear and the Bear Tribe
1992 / 10 Jun 1993	Sun Bear dies; the <i>Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality</i> follows. It names no individuals
2012	The Menominee and Wisconsin DNR begin relocating mature sturgeon above the Wolf River dams

In the year

The sturgeon's own great month is **not** this one. Lake sturgeon spawn in **April to June**, on clean gravel shoals at 13–18 °C, circling each other and shaking; the popular image of a "sturgeon moon" in high summer does not match the fish's calendar. And they spawn rarely — males every two to seven years, females every four to nine, with only ten to twenty per cent of adults breeding in a given year. A female may not spawn at all until she is twenty-four or twenty-six, and she may live **80 to 150 years**. On Lake Winnebago the spearing season is in **February**, through the ice.

What late July and August do hold is the ripening the book's moon name catches, and the northern nations name the month the same way. **Anishinaabemowin** gives August as ***Manoominike-giizis***, the ricing moon — which brings the sturgeon back round, since the fish is remembered by the Menominee as the rice's protector. **Lakhótiyapi** gives ***Wasúthu? Wí***, the moon when things ripen, also recorded as ***Khá?tašá Wí***, the red plum moon. These are lunar months, only approximately aligned to Gregorian ones, and the names vary by community.

The lake sturgeon is listed **Endangered** by the IUCN, and threatened or endangered in nineteen of the twenty US states in its original range.

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