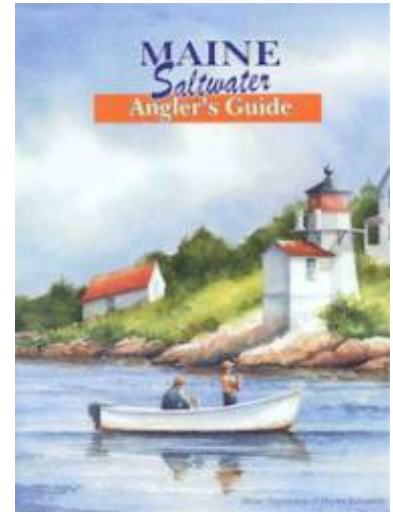


Do You Know Your Catch?

One of the most commonly asked questions by anglers, at some point in time, is "What is it?" Knowing what you caught is extremely important for many reasons, including the reason that misidentification can lead to violations of fisheries regulations. This section is meant to guide the angler through thirty-six of Maine's most commonly encountered saltwater species. These fish are grouped into Families as listed in the American Fisheries Society publication, "Common and Scientific Names of Fishes."



Arrangement of the fish identification section

Common names: Other names used in various geographical locations to identify each species.

Description: To properly identify your catch these commonly observed attributes can be used.

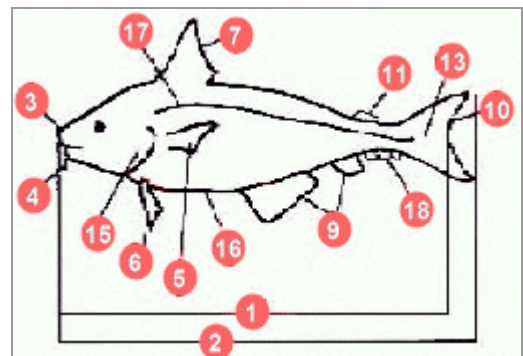
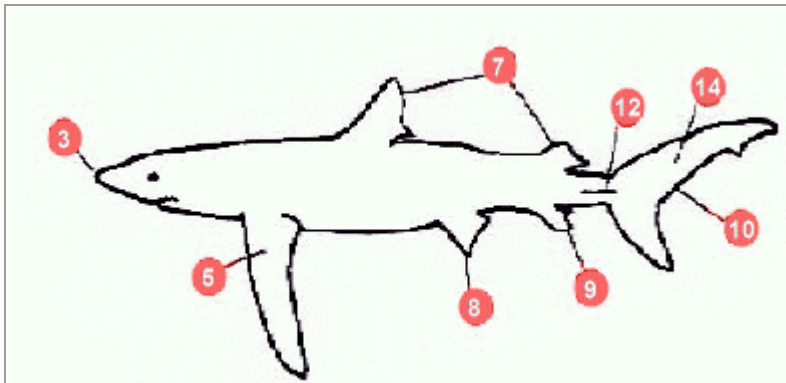
Where found: Though fish often know no bounds, there are general locations where they most commonly may be found.

Similar Gulf of Maine species: Here are listed other fish that resemble this species and may cause identification problems.

Remarks: This includes life history, behavior, feeding habits and angling information.

Records: The current Maine State Saltwater Angler Record (MSSAR)* and the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) records are listed.

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. fork length | 7. dorsal fin | 13. caudal peduncle |
| 2. total length | 8. pelvic fin | 14. upper lobe of tail fin |
| 3. snout | 9. anal fin | 15. gill cover |
| 4. barbel | 10. tail (caudal) fin | 16. midline |
| 5. pectoral fin | 11. adipose fin | 17. lateral line |
| 6. ventral fin | 12. caudal keel | 18. finlets |

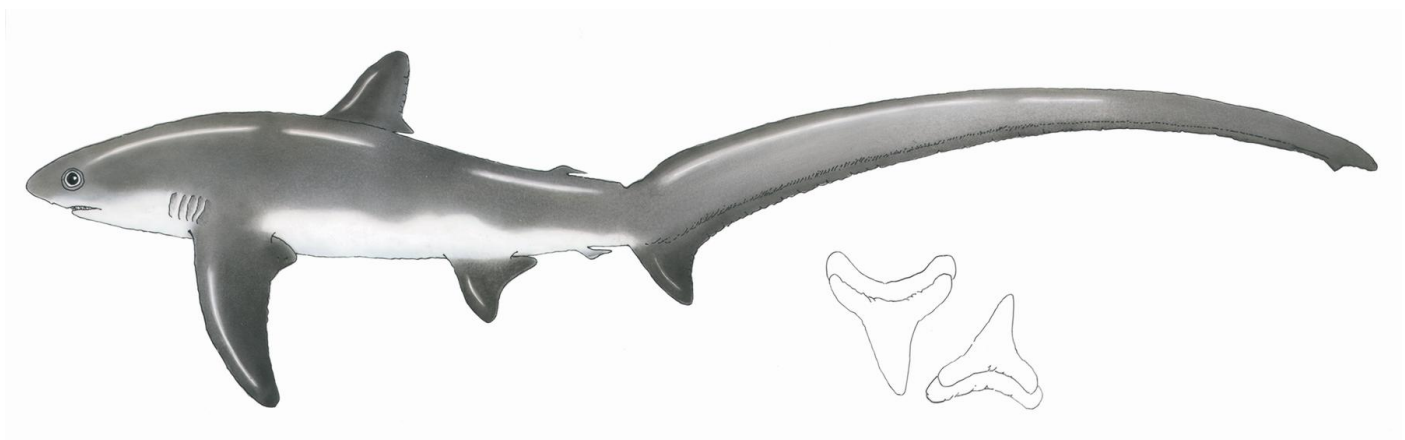


If you have any questions regarding recreational fishing or this species listed above please contact [Bruce Joule](#).

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Thresher Shark (*Alopias vulpinus*)

Family Alopiidae, Thresher sharks



Common names: thresher, spindletail

Description: Thresher sharks are brown to black on top, blending to a shade of white below. These sharks are noted for the extraordinarily long length of their tail fin, the elongated upper lobe of their tail accounting for over half of their total body length. Their snout is short and they have a blunt rounded nose. They have two dorsal fins, the first of which is located almost squarely in the middle of their back, and an anal fin. A thresher shark's pectoral fins are long and sickle shaped. Their teeth are small, smooth edged and have a single sharp cusp. Thresher sharks normally measure approximately 10 feet in length, although large ones can grow to 15 feet. Average weight for these fish is close to 250 pounds with the heaviest weighing in at 700 pounds. Their length to weight ratio is the lightest of all the sharks because of the unusual length of their tail.

Where Found: offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: none

Remarks: Thresher sharks feed chiefly on small schooling fish such as herring, mackerel and menhaden. These sharks, usually working in pairs, use their long tails to frighten their prey into a group. Thresher sharks are very active fighters when hooked. Often they are caught by their tail because of the unique way in which they use their tail when feeding. Their meat is of good quality.

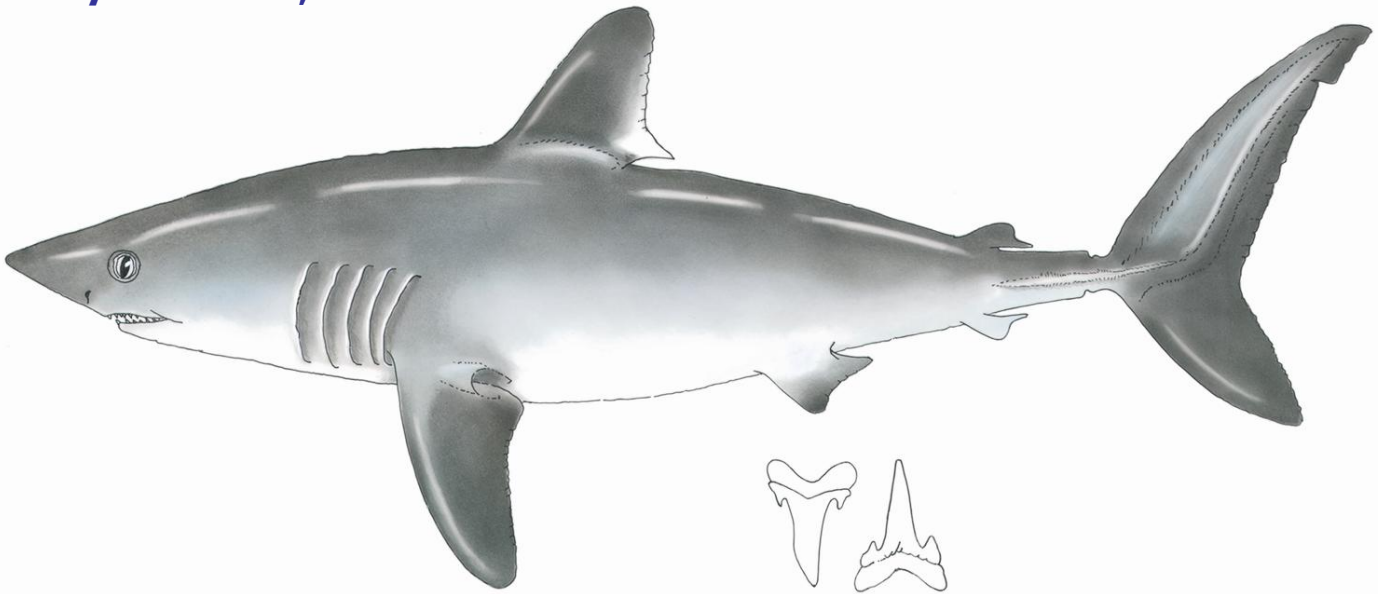
Records: MSSAR
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Porbeagle Shark (Lamna nasus)

Family Lamnidae, Mackerel sharks



Common names: porbeagle, mackerel shark

Description: Porbeagle sharks are dark blue gray above with white on their lower sides and underbelly. A distinctive patch of white can be found at the trailing edge of their first dorsal fin. These sharks have a pointed snout, a stout torpedo shaped body and a crescent shaped tail fin. Porbeagle sharks can be distinguished from white and mako sharks by their teeth, which are smooth edged and have a little cusp present along each side of the base of each tooth, and by the presence of two caudal keels on their tail fin. These sharks can grow to 10 feet and weigh over 450 pounds.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: white shark, mako shark

Remarks: Porbeagle sharks are strong, fast swimmers that are capable of rapid acceleration. A good sportfish, they can put up a determined fight when hooked. Fishing methods include trolling or bait fishing while chumming. Favorite baits are mackerel, herring and squid. The meat of the porbeagle is of good eating quality.

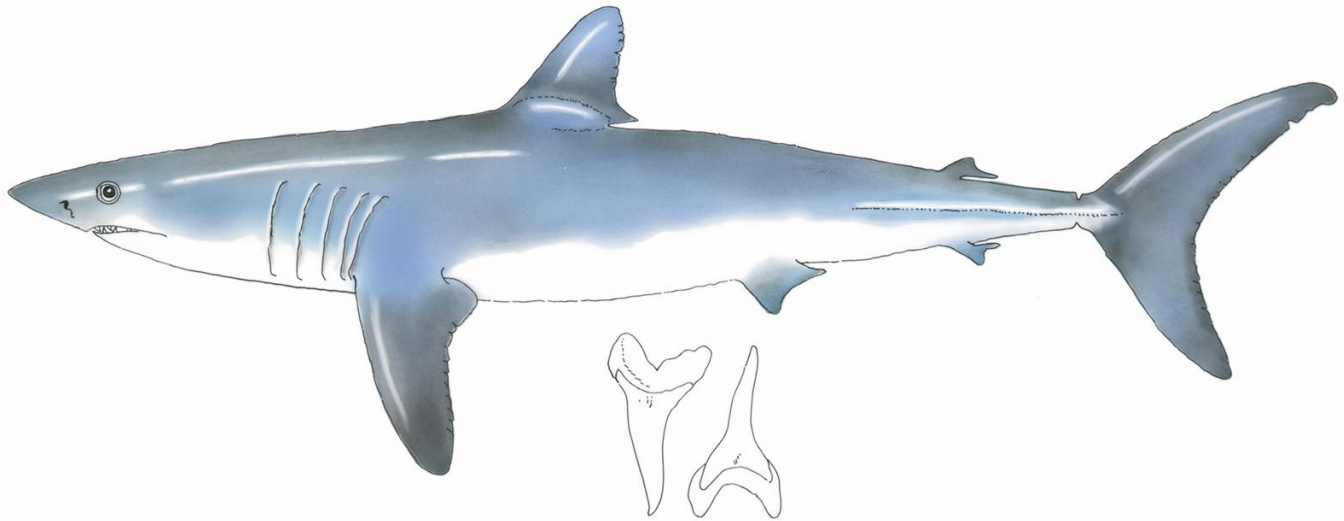
Records: MSSAR
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Shortfin Mako Shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*)

Family Lamnidae, Mackerel sharks



Common name: mako

Description: These sharks are a brilliant blue gray or cobalt blue on top, changing to light blue along their sides and snowy white on their belly and lower jaw. Soon after death their brilliant color fades to grayish brown. Shortfin mako sharks are large, streamline shaped fish that have a conical snout and a crescent shaped tail fin. Shortfin makos, though similar to blue sharks in color, differ in the shape of their snout. Their long slender teeth, which curve inward and have no cusps at their bases or serrations along their edges, easily separate them from white sharks and porbeagles. Shortfin makos can grow to 12 feet in length and weigh as much as 1,100 pounds.

Where found: offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: white shark, porbeagle shark

Remarks: Shortfin makos are pelagic, solitary and fast swimming. They are prized by sport-fishermen because of their large size and great fighting ability. Makos are also known for their acrobatic ability, which enables them to leap up to 20 feet when hooked. Their meat is excellent to eat.

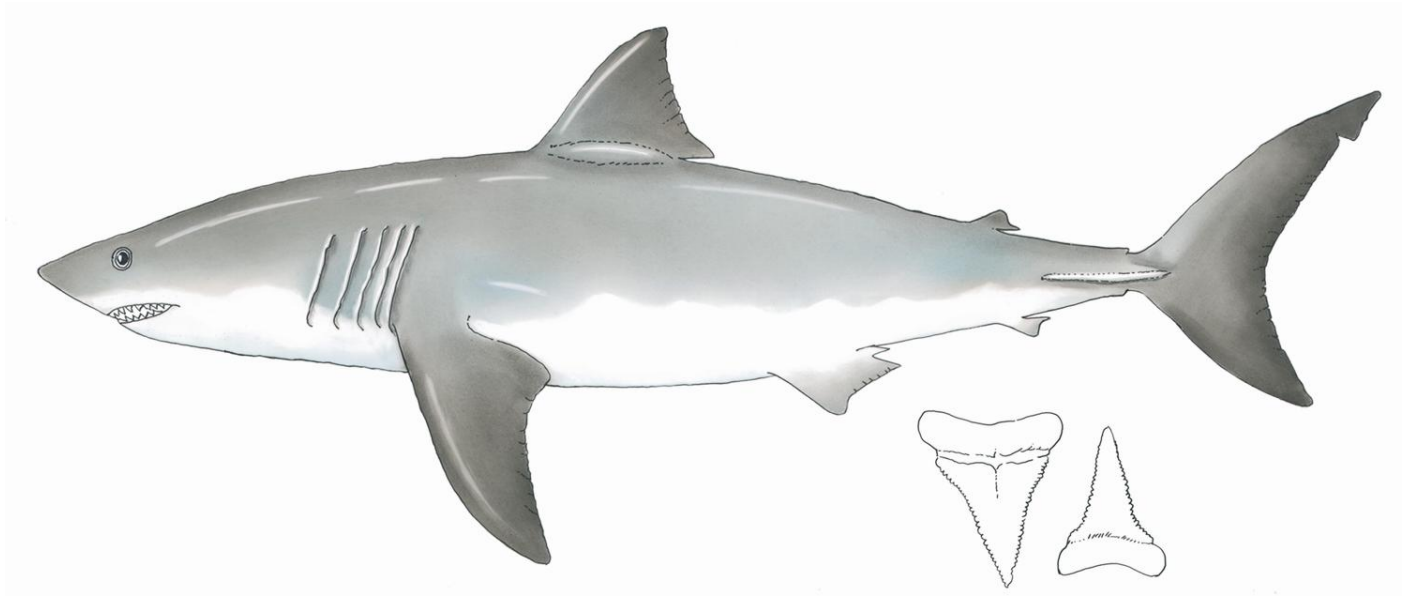
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White Shark (Carcharodon carcharias)

Family Lamnidae, Mackerel sharks



Common name: great white, maneater

Description: White sharks are gray to brown above and fade to dirty white around their belly. A distinctive black spot can be found just behind the base of each of their two pectoral fins. White sharks are large, full bodied fish with conical snouts. Their lunate tail fin has caudal keels and lobes of equal length. The teeth of a white shark are large and triangular with serrated edges. These fish average about 15 feet in length and weigh approximately 1,500 pounds, though large examples have been measured at 21 feet and upwards of 4,800 pounds. White sharks, as well as basking sharks, are federally protected species.

Where found: offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: mako shark, basking shark, porbeagle shark

Remarks: White sharks are strong swimmers and voracious predators. Their diet consists of both large and small prey. These sharks can easily devour marine mammals or other large sharks and have been known to attack humans. In Maine's coastal waters, they may be found where there is a high concentration of seals or a floating dead whale carcass.

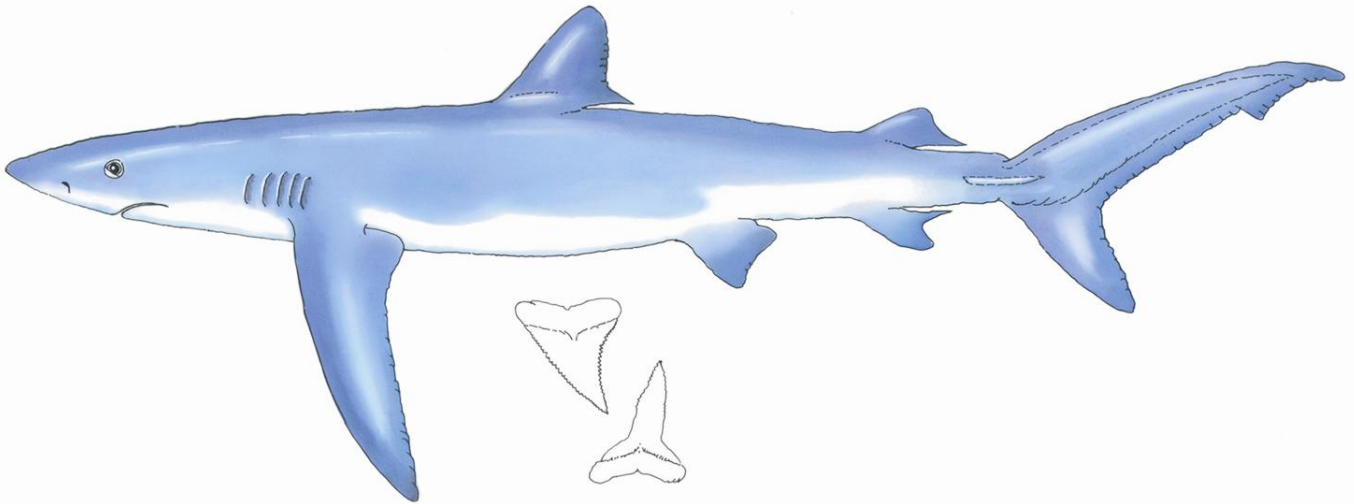
Records: MSSAR: CLOSED
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Blue Shark (Prionace glauca)

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem sharks



Common names: blue shark, blue whaler

Description: Blue sharks are a distinctive dark indigo blue on top, which blends to a lighter bright blue down their sides and ends with a bright white under-belly. Soon after death their blue coloration fades to dark gray. Blue sharks have long slender bodies and pointed snouts. Their pectoral fins are long and sickle shaped. The teeth in their upper jaw are triangular, serrated and curved; their lower teeth are narrower and very sharp. Blue sharks generally attain a length of 6 to 8 feet and weigh from 50 to 200 pounds. Large blues can grow to 12 feet in length and weigh over 400 pounds.

Where found: offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: none

Remarks: Blue sharks are pelagic and migratory in nature. They frequently swim together at the surface and are known to follow boats to get a free meal. Blue sharks are a popular sportfish in the Gulf of Maine because they are plentiful and are easy to catch. Most blue sharks are released when caught because of the poor quality of their meat as food. Chumming with herring, mackerel and menhaden works well when trying to attract these sharks.

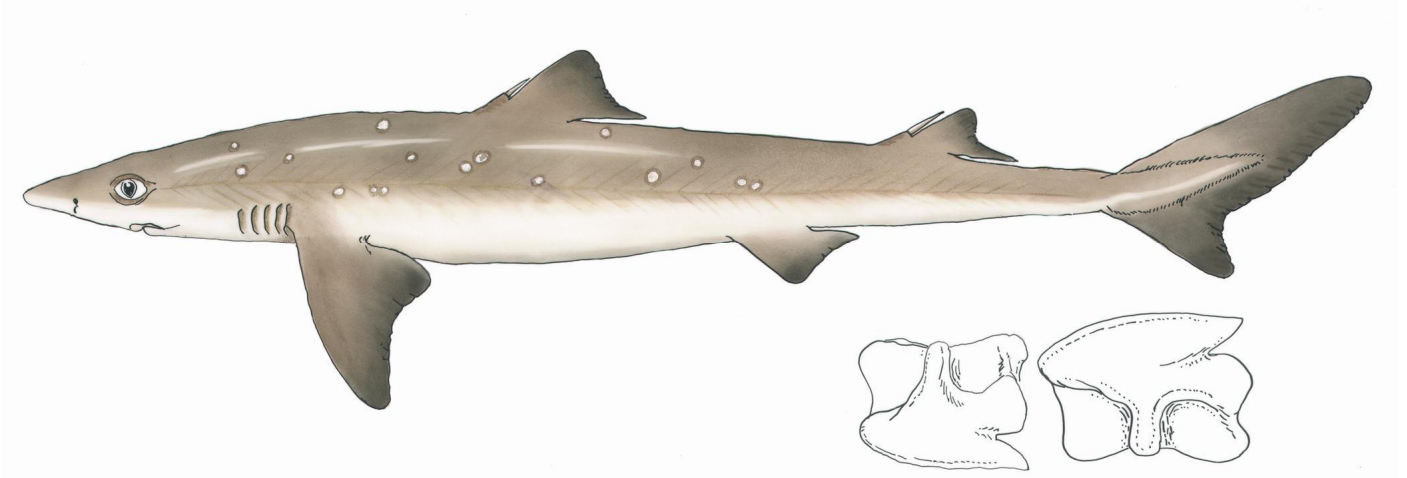
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Spiny Dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*)

Family Squalidae, Dogfish sharks



Common names: dogfish, sand shark

Description: Spiny dogfish are gray to slate brown with a pale or white belly. They can be differentiated from other small sharks by a row of small white dots running along their sides. If these dots are faded or absent, which can happen with older dogfish, a distinctive single spine found in front of each of their two dorsal fins can be used as an additional identifying feature. The bodies of these fish are slender and their heads slope to a blunt snout. In size, adult females can reach lengths of 3 1/2 feet and weigh around 8 pounds, while males are normally smaller in size.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: smooth dogfish

Remarks: Spiny dogfish are voracious eaters, preying on a variety of sea creatures, such as squid, shrimp and crabs, along with almost any species of fish that they can swallow. They mostly travel in large schools made of approximately equal size fish. These fish are known to winter in offshore waters and show up in the Gulf of Maine during the late spring or early summer. They are usually found in water depths ranging from surface waters to 600 feet.

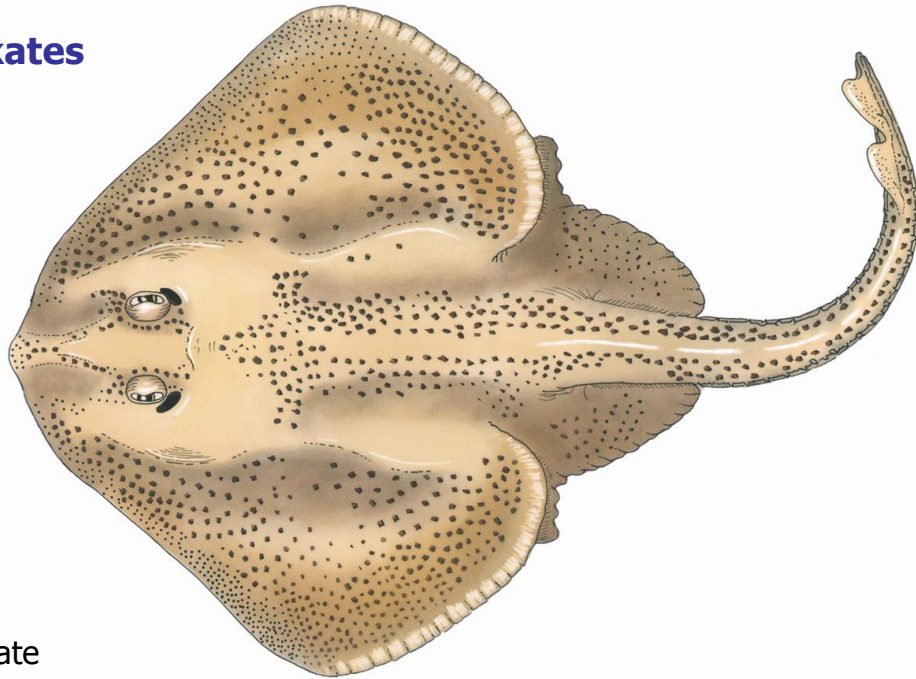
Records: MSSAR
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Little Skate (Raja erinacea)

Family Rajidae, Skates



Common name: skate

Description: Little skates are gray to dark brown above and have a pale underbody. Small dark spots usually cover the top half of their body. These fish are about as wide as they are long and have a flattened, disc-like shape. Their pectoral fins, which act as modified wings, gracefully propel them through the water. Three or more rows of thorns run down their back, except in adults where they also run along the midline of their body and tail. Little skates average between 16 and 20 inches in length.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: winter skate

Remarks: Little skates are smaller in size than any other skate species found in the Gulf of Maine. They prefer a sand to gravel type bottom of no deeper than 300 feet. These fish migrate into shallower water as it warms in the spring and then move back to deeper water in the winter as water temperatures drop. Little skates feed on a variety of crustaceans as well as clams, squid and worms. Often, beachcombers will find their dried egg cases along the shore. These cases are dark green to black in color and look like flattened capsules with four points.

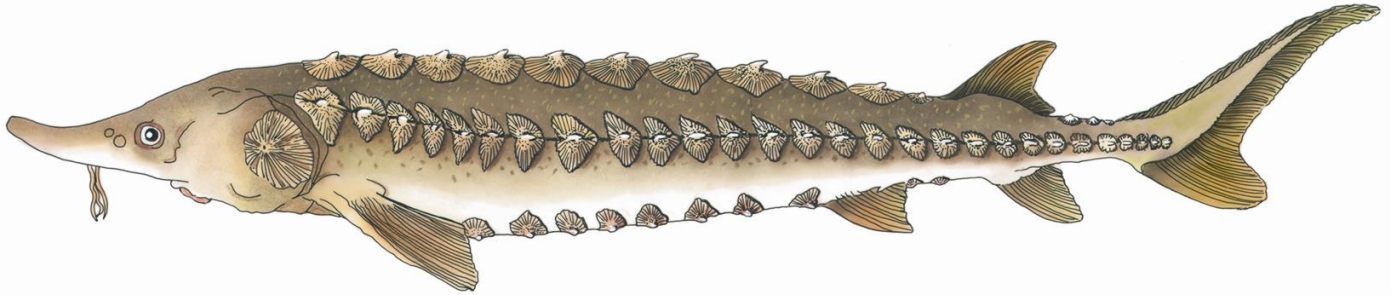
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Atlantic sturgeon (Acipenser oxyrinchus)

Family Acipenseridae, Sturgeons



Common name: sea sturgeon

Description: Atlantic sturgeon are olive green or blue gray above, gradually fading on the sides to a white underbelly. These are large, slow-to-mature fish that can grow to 18 feet in length. Their body is covered with five rows of large bony shields known as scutes. Atlantic sturgeon are designed to be effective bottom feeders. Their toothless mouth, which is located beneath their long snout, is capable of being thrust outward, allowing them to suck food off the bottom like a vacuum cleaner. Four barbels in front of their mouth help them to sense food. Their tail fin resembles the tail fin of some sharks in that their upper lobe measures much longer than their lower lobe.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: shortnose sturgeon

Remarks: Atlantic sturgeon are primitive looking fish that are best known for the caviar (fish eggs) they produce. Being anadromous in nature, they return to their natal rivers to spawn. Most of their growth is believed to occur out at sea where they feed on various invertebrates and small fish. In Maine waters, law protects both the Atlantic sturgeon and the shortnose sturgeon.

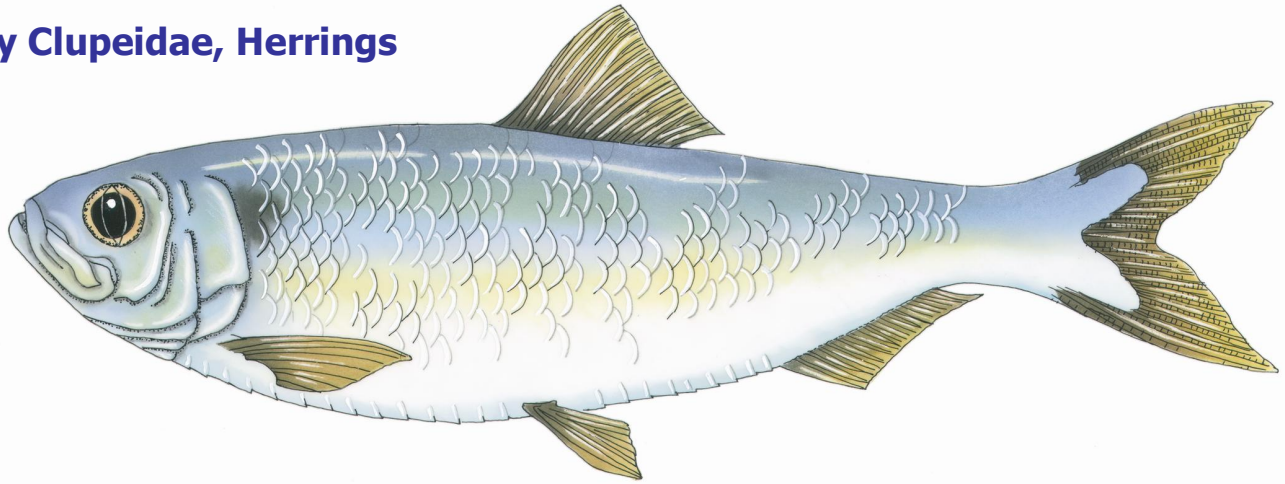
Records: MSSAR: CLOSED
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Alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*)

Family Clupeidae, Herrings



Common names: River herring, sawbelly, kyak, branch herring, freshwater herring

Description: Alewives are an iridescent gray green or violet shade on top that fades down their sides to a silver underbelly. They usually have a distinct dusky spot just behind the upper margin of their gill cover. Their strongly laterally compressed (skinny) body is three and one-third times as long as it is deep and has a forked tail fin. The midline of their belly is sharp and saw edged. Serrations located on the midline of their belly are much stronger and sharper than the ones found on most other members of their family. Adult alewives normally grow to be 10 to 11 inches in length and 8 to 9 ounces in weight.

Where found: Inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: blueback herring, Atlantic herring, American shad, Atlantic menhaden

Remarks: Alewives are anadromous fish, living in saltwater and seasonally returning to freshwater to spawn. Throughout most of the year they travel the coast in large schools, foraging on plankton. Then, in the spring, they run up coastal streams and rivers toward ponds and lakes where they spawn. As a rule, alewives spawn in slack water. Because they are not jumpers, manmade or natural barriers sometimes block their spawning migration. Generally, alewives are only an incidental catch for saltwater recreational fishermen. However, they are harvested commercially both for human consumption and for bait.

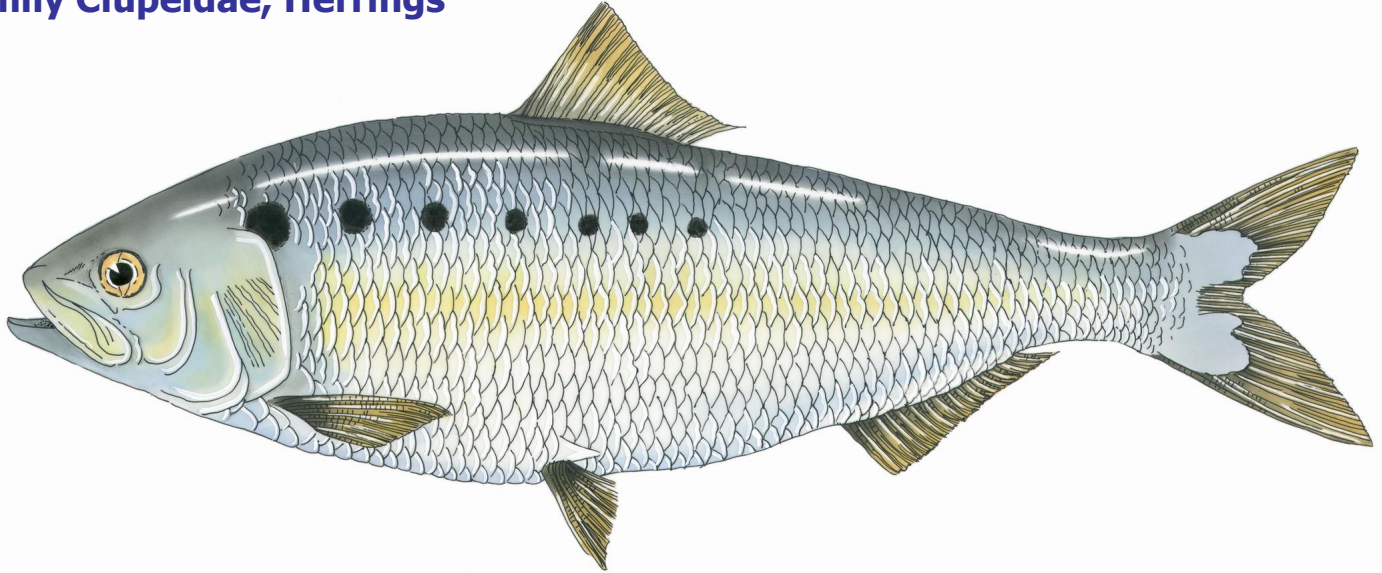
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American Shad (*Alosa sapidissima*)

Family Clupeidae, Herrings



Common names: shad, Atlantic shad, white shad

Description: American shad are dark blue to green above with paler sides and a silver underbelly. Behind the upper edge of their gill cover is a large dusky spot that is usually followed by several small, less distinct, dusky spots. These fish have a laterally compressed body and a deeply forked tail fin. The midline of their belly is saw edged and sharp and their scales are large. They have only one dorsal fin and one anal fin. American shad are the largest members of the true herring family and can grow to 30 inches in length and weigh over 9 pounds.

Where found: inshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: Atlantic herring, alewife, blueback herring, Atlantic menhaden

Remarks: American shad are anadromous fish. Commonly known as 'the poor man's tarpon,' shad are highly sought after as a sportfish because of their feisty nature and their ability to leap. The most popular time of year to go shad fishing is in the spring when these fish are returning to their coastal streams and rivers to spawn. Although shad are primarily plankton feeders, they will take a variety of baits, lures and flies. Either light spinning or fly fishing gear is recommended.

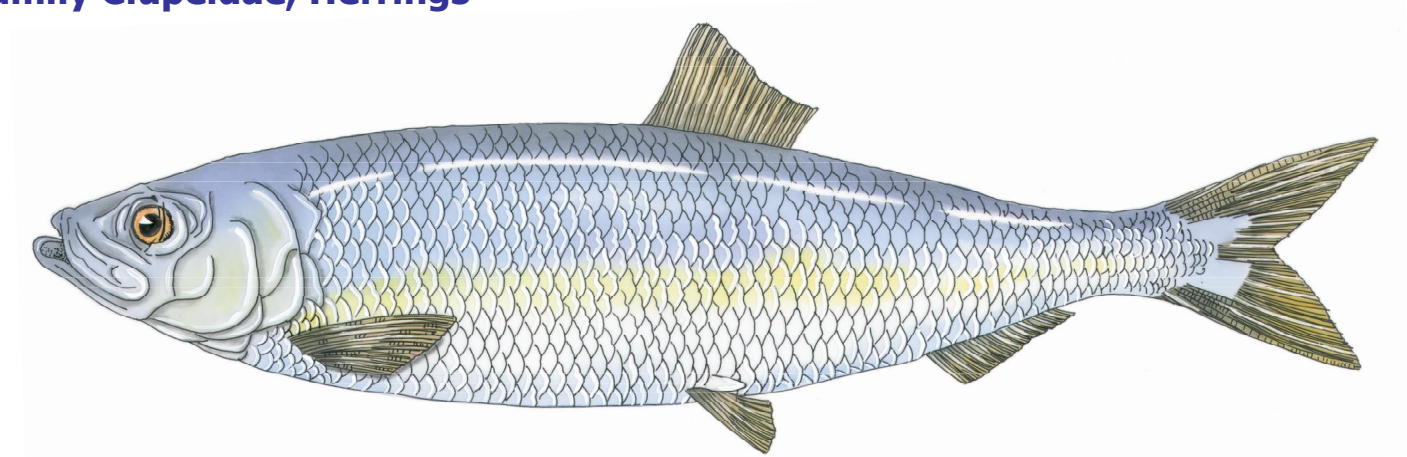
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Atlantic Herring (Clupea harengus)

Family Clupeidae, Herrings



Common names: brit, labrador herring, sardine, sea herring

Description: Atlantic herring are deep blue or blue green above with silver sides and underbody. They are laterally compressed, making them much deeper than they are wide, with only a slightly saw toothed belly midline. Their lower jaw protrudes beyond their upper lip when their large mouth is closed, creating a moderately pointed snout. Unlike their relatives (the American shad, Atlantic menhaden, blueback herring and alewife), the Atlantic herring's dorsal fin starts at about the middle of its back. These fish have a deeply forked tall fin and large scales that easily come free when touched. Atlantic herring can grow to about 17 inches in length and weigh up to 1/2 pound.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: Atlantic menhaden, blueback herring, alewife, American shad

Remarks: Atlantic herring are a schooling, zooplankton eating fish which are heavily preyed upon by a variety of marine mammals, sea birds and fish. Many of the most popular gamefish are dependent upon herring as a food source.

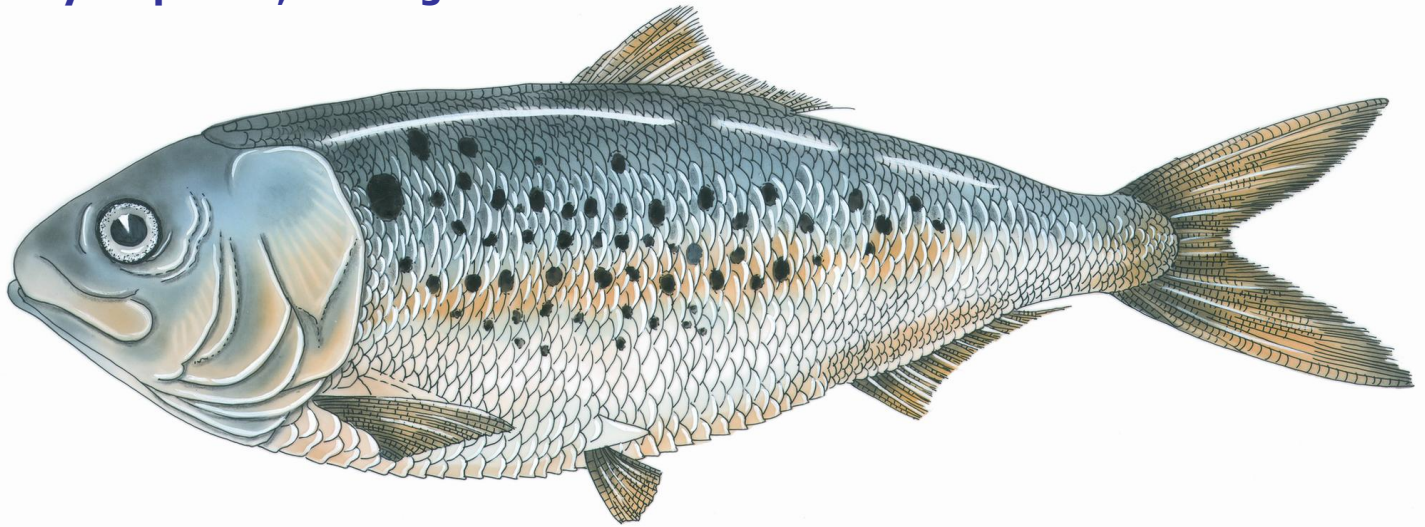
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Atlantic Menhaden (Brevoortia tyrannus)

Family Clupeidae, Herrings



Common names: pogey, bunker, mossbunker

Description: Atlantic menhaden are blue to green above with silver sides and underbelly. A distinct dusky spot is located behind their upper gill cover, followed by a varying number of smaller spots arranged in irregular rows. Atlantic menhaden have a laterally compressed body. Their large head has a mouth that gapes as far back as the rear edge of their eyes. These fish have a deeply forked tail fin and, like other members of the herring family, have only one dorsal and one anal fin. Overall body length is about three times their depth. Adult Atlantic menhaden average from 12 to 15 inches in length and 2/3 to one pound in weight.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: Atlantic herring, alewife, blueback herring, American shad

Remarks: Atlantic menhaden travel in large schools of equal size fish. They tend to swim near the surface and often congregate in locales with extensive estuarine systems. These fish are extremely efficient plankton eaters. They, in turn, are preyed upon by a vast number of saltwater fish, birds and marine mammals, as well as by man. Atlantic menhaden will not bite a baited hook. When available, menhaden are often used as bait for catching a variety of saltwater sportfish.

Records: MSSAR

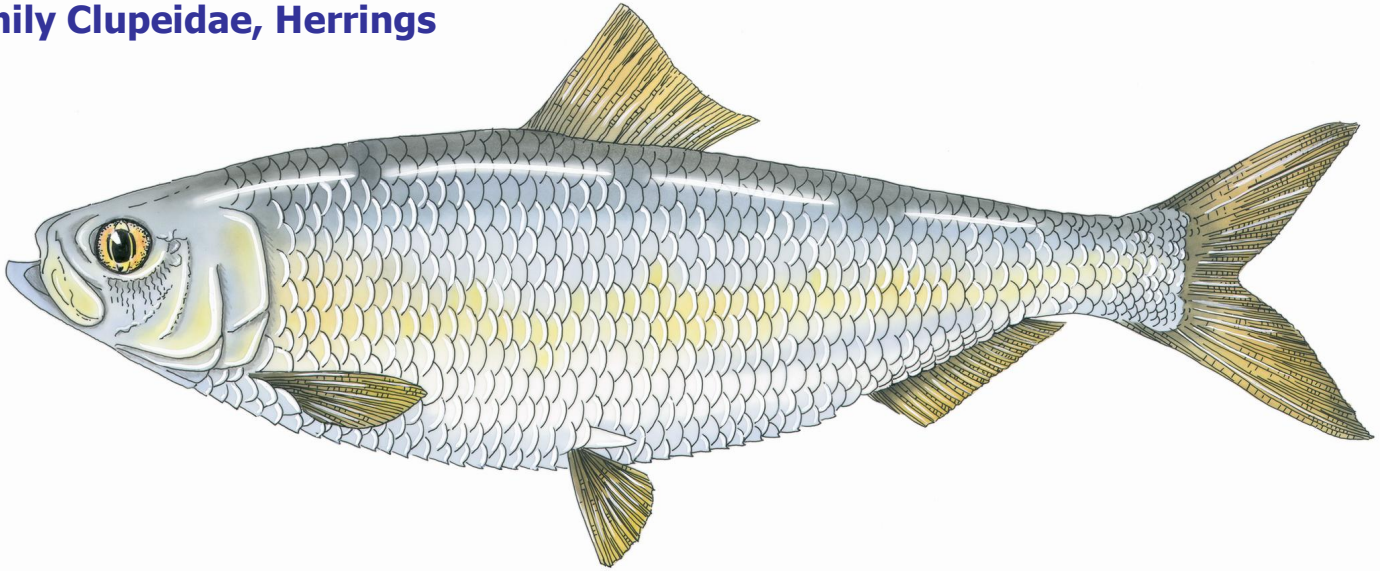
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Blueback Herring (*Alosa aestivalis*)

Family Clupeidae, Herrings



Common names: river herring, glut herring, summer herring, kyack, blackbelly

Description: Blueback herring are gray green to blue green on top, which fades down their sides to a silver underbelly. Their body is laterally compressed with the midline of their belly being sharp and saw edged. Their tail fin is forked. Because of the difficulty in visually separating blueback herring from alewives, the two species are often lumped together and referred to as "river herring". Blueback herring can be distinguished from alewives by the facts that alewives have a larger eye and, if you were to cut each open, the body cavity in the blueback herring is black while the alewife's is pink gray. On average, blueback herring grow to be 10 to 11 inches in length and 8 to 9 ounces in weight.

Where found: inshore and offshore.

Similar Gulf of Maine species: alewife, American shad, Atlantic menhaden

Remarks: Like their relatives the alewives, blueback herring are anadromous, living in saltwater and returning to freshwater to spawn. They travel along the coast in large schools, feeding on plankton for most of the year. In the spring, bluebacks run up coastal streams and rivers to spawn. Unlike alewives, blueback herring will spawn in moving water.

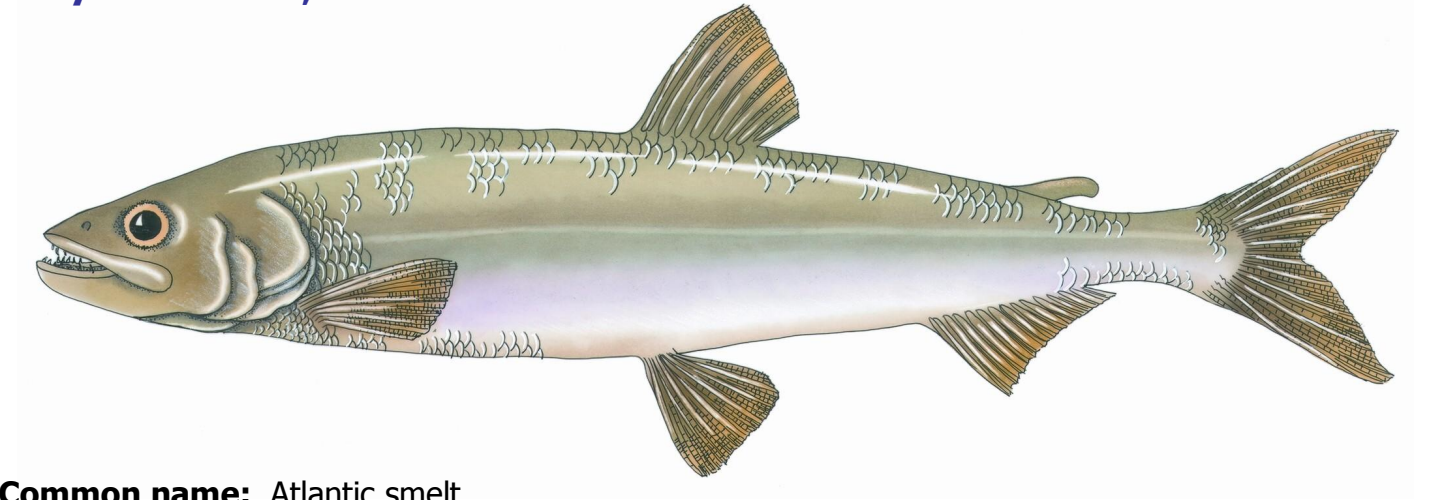
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Rainbow Smelt (*Osmerus mordax*)

Family Osmeridae, Smelt



Common name: Atlantic smelt

Description: Rainbow smelt are mostly a dark blue green with bright silver sides. These fish possess a slender body with a pointed head and deeply forked tail fin. A small adipose fin is located between their single dorsal fin and tail fin. Their large mouth contains numerous teeth that they use to catch and hold their prey. Rainbow smelt rarely grow over 13 inches with the average adult measuring between 7 and 9 inches.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: capelin

Remarks: In Maine, rainbow smelt are a prized food fish that are harvested in three distinct fisheries. During the spring months, as these anadromous fish move into their natal streams to spawn, fishermen use dip nets to capture them. The fall season supports a riverine and coastal bay hook and line fishery. A lightweight spinning rod and reel is considered the equipment of choice for smelt. Common baits used are mummichogs, marine worms and clams. In winter, anglers fish for smelt through the ice. The most popular baits used in this fishery are marine worms. To protect themselves from the winter cold, fishermen frequently fish from shanties or shacks. This latter manner of fishing has proven to be very popular on many of the state's tidal rivers and saltwater bays.

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Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)

Family Salmonidae, Trouts



Common names: sea salmon, silver salmon, black salmon, eastern salmon

Description: When in the ocean, Atlantic salmon are silvery with a brown tinted back. Their upper body, head and fins are often marked with small black crosses and dots. Both their head and eyes are small. This fish's body depth generally measures one-fourth of its total body length. Like other members of the trout family, they possess a small fleshy adipose fin, located between their single dorsal fin and tail fin.

Where found: inshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: sea-run brown trout, rainbow smelt

Remarks: Atlantic salmon are another anadromous species. Many saltwater sport-fishermen consider these fish to be "the king of fish" because of their great leaping ability and determined fight when hooked. In Maine, fishing for Atlantic salmon is currently prohibited. A variety of fly patterns such as the Brown Bomber and the Green Machine were successfully used, when there was a Maine fishery for Atlantic salmon, and some designs, like the Green Highlander and Jock Scott, go back to the origin of fly fishing history.

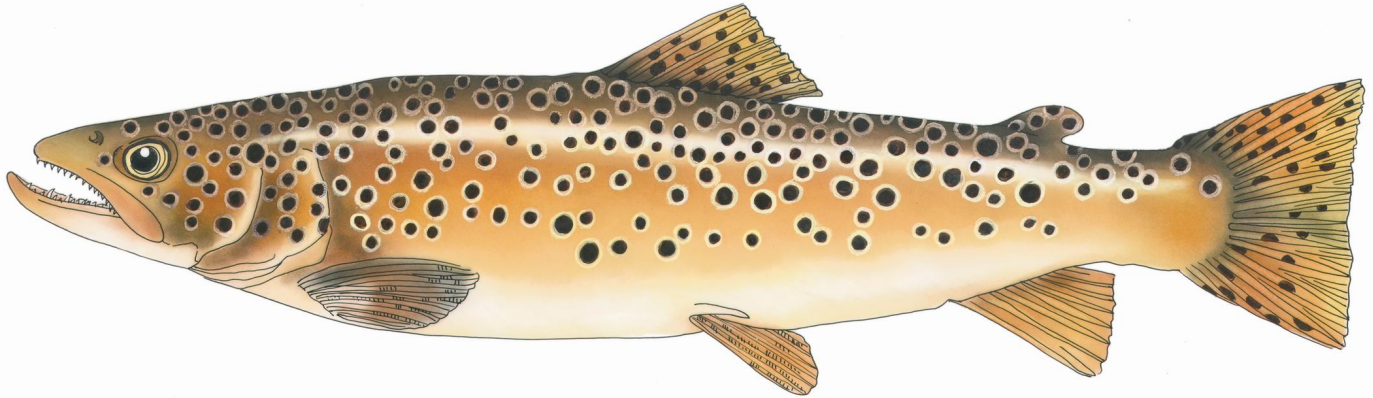
Records: MSSAR: CLOSED
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Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*)

Family Salmonidae, Trouts



Common names: sea-run brown trout, Scotch sea-trout, brownie, German brown trout

Description: Brown trout are yellow brown to tan and may have numerous large brown or black spots on their sides, back and dorsal fin. These fish are slender in shape and have a squarish tail fin. An adipose fin is located between their dorsal fin and tail fin. Sea-run brown trout closely resemble Atlantic salmon, both in shape and coloration. A sure way of telling the two apart is by looking at the teeth located on the roof of their mouth. Brown trout possess a well developed double row of teeth, while salmon and other native salmonids have only a single row. Adult brown trout generally are 1 to 5 pounds in weight but can grow to 30 pounds or more.

Where found: inshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: Atlantic salmon, brook trout, rainbow trout

Remarks: Brown trout can tolerate higher water temperatures and poorer water quality than most other species of salmon and trout. These fish are not native to North America, having been brought here from Europe. Brown trout are considered by many anglers to be a difficult fish to catch. Since they are active at night, both late evening and early morning are considered the best times to fish for browns.

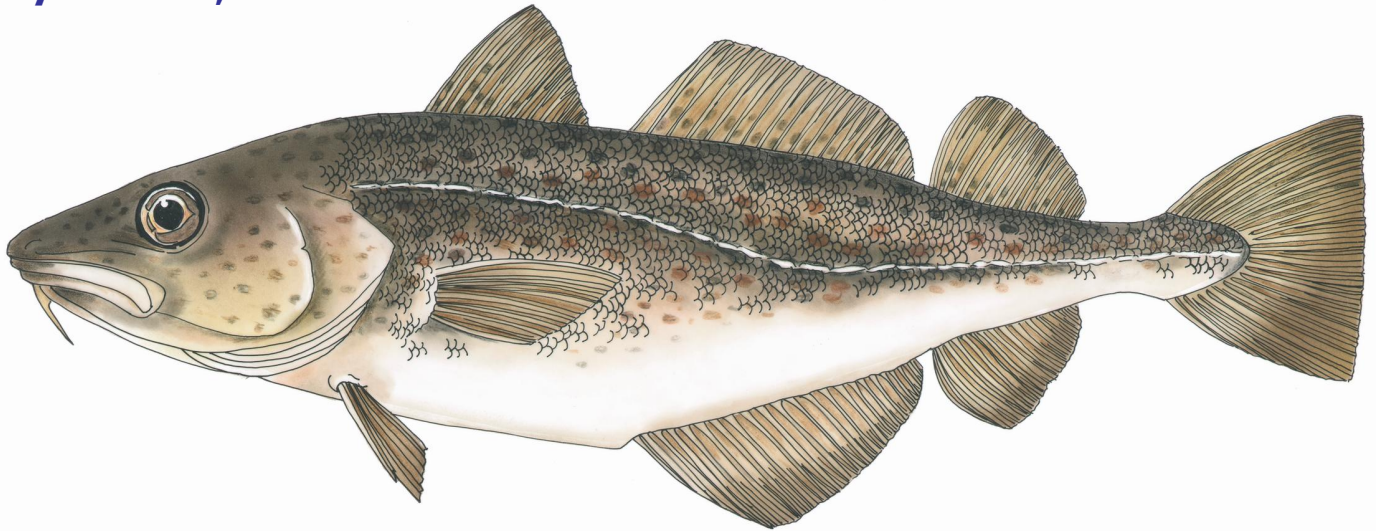
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Atlantic Cod (*Gadus morhua*)

Family Gadidae, Cods



Common names: codfish, cod

Description: The color of Atlantic codfish can vary from gray to gray green to reddish brown. They are usually covered with reddish brown spots. Their lateral line is pale, almost white. Cod are streamline in shape, have a broad square tail fin, three rounded dorsal fins, two anal fins and no fin spines. Their upper jaw is blunt and extends beyond the lower jaw. A prominent chin whisker (barbel) is attached to their lower jaw. These fish are four to five times as long as they are deep, being deepest just behind the head.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: hake, pollock, haddock

Remarks: Atlantic cod are bottom dwelling fish that prefer substrates ranging from rock to fine gravel. Cod are the target species of many of Maine's headboat anglers. A 5 to 8 foot medium to heavy action rod, equipped with a heavy reel and spooled with 50-pound test dacron line is considered standard gear. Successful anglers use either a jig (10 ounces and up) coupled with a teaser (plastic worm), which are fished off the bottom with a jerking motion, or bait (clams and shrimp).

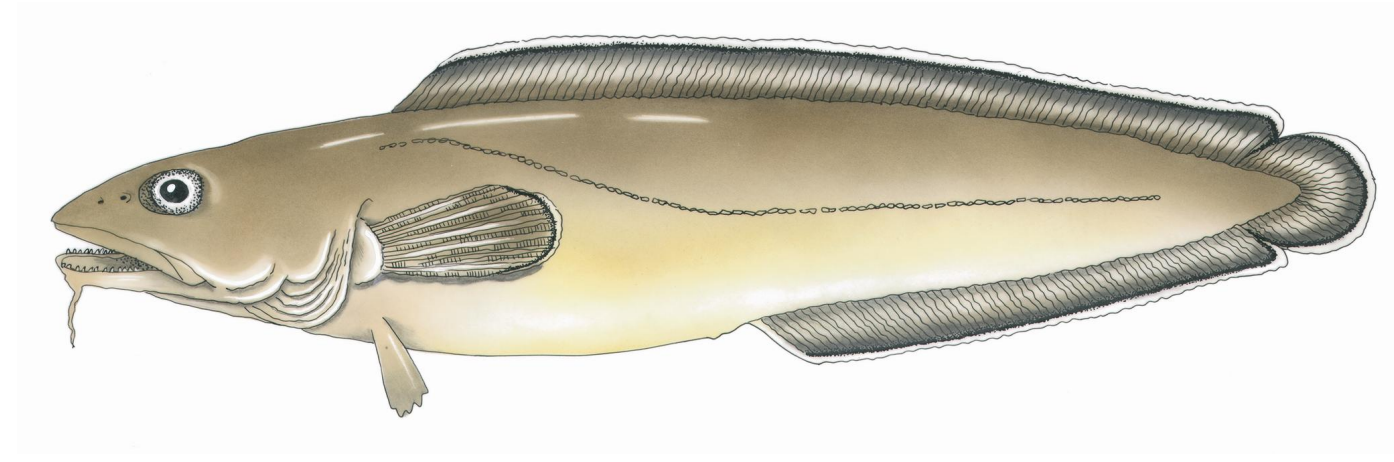
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Cusk (*Brosme brosme*)

Family Gadidae, Cods



Common name: cusk

Description: Cusk are dark slate to red brown above with yellowish sides and a dirty white underbody. They have an elongated, taper shaped body with a blunt snout and a single barbel on their chin. Their dorsal and anal fins are exceptionally long and they have a rounded tail fin, all of which are bordered with a black stripe that is edged in white. Cusk can grow to a size of about 3 1/2 feet in length and to 30 pounds in weight. Their average size in the waters of the Gulf of Maine, however, is closer to 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 feet in length and 5 to 10 pounds in weight.

Where found: offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: wolffish, eel pout

Remarks: Cusk are exclusively bottom dwellers that inhabit moderately deep waters of 60 to 90 feet. They prefer a hard rough substrate made up of rocks or boulders. These fish are solitary in nature and are not particularly abundant. Cusk are excellent table fare, particularly in chowders and stews. Occasionally, anglers will hook onto a cusk while fishing for cod or haddock. Although these fish are considered to be weak and sluggish swimmers, they have a powerful body. Both clams and herring work well as bait when fishing for cusk.

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Haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*)

Family Gadidae, Cods



Common name: haddock

Description: These fish are dark gray above with silvery sides and a white underbody. They have a black lateral line and show no spots. A distinctive large black blotch, referred to as "the devil's thumbprint," is located behind and above their pectoral fins. Haddock, like cod, have three dorsal fins and two anal fins. With haddock, the first dorsal fin is visibly pointed. A small chin barbel can be found on their lower jaw and they have a shallowly forked tail fin. At three years of age, haddock typically measure 19 to 20 inches in length.

Where found: offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: pollock, cod

Remarks: Haddock are bottom feeders that generally inhabit water depths ranging from 100 to 500 feet. Unlike cod, they often avoid the rocky bottom and prefer a bottom of clay, smooth hard sand or fragmented shells. Haddock are known to bite as freely as cod and when hooked are considerably more active. The fishing tackle and baits used for cod also work well for haddock. Haddock is a sweet tasting fish, making it a prized food item.

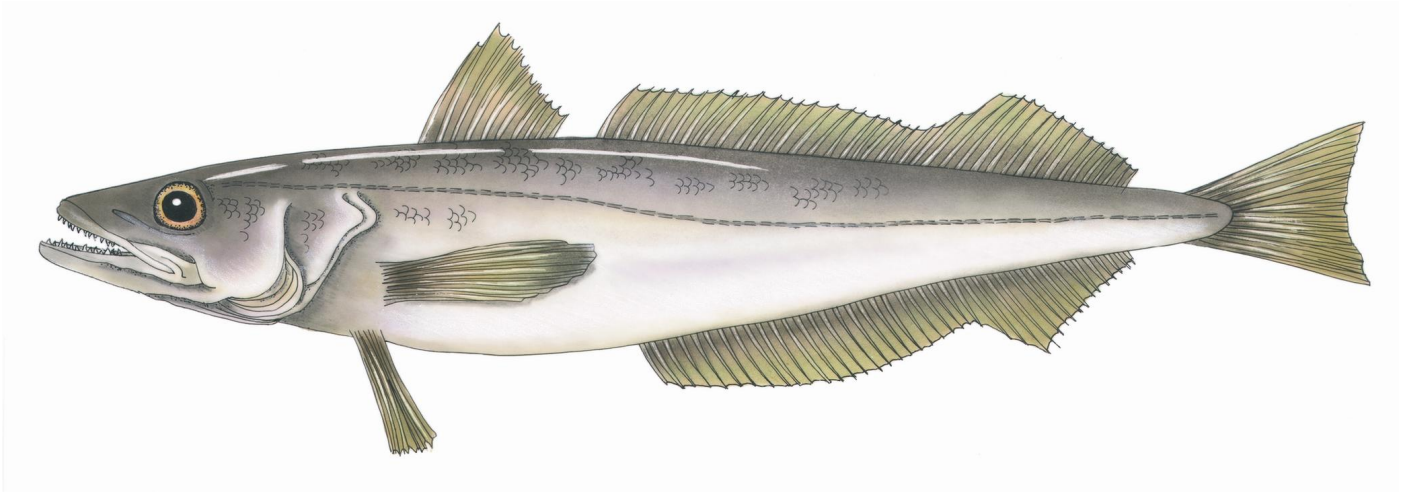
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Silver Hake (Merluccius bilinearis)

Family Gadidae, Cods



Common names: silver hake, New England hake, whiting

Description: Silver hake are iridescent gray brown above, fading to a silvery shade below. Their large mouth, with a projecting lower jaw, is lined with two or more rows of sharp curved teeth. Silver hake have no chin barbel. Being slender fish, they are five to six times as long as they are deep. They have two separate and well developed dorsal fins, the second being much longer than the first. They also have an extended anal fin, and their ventral fins lack the long feelers that are so obvious on other hakes. Adult silver hake normally measure around 14 inches in length.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: white hake, red hake, longfin hake

Remarks: Silver hake are strong, swift swimmers and voracious feeders. Their prey includes a variety of fish such as herring, mackerel, menhaden and silversides. Silver hake is usually a bycatch of anglers who are fishing for cod or haddock. They bite readily, but don't put up much of a fight. Their meat is delicate and, if chilled right away, is tender and sweet tasting.

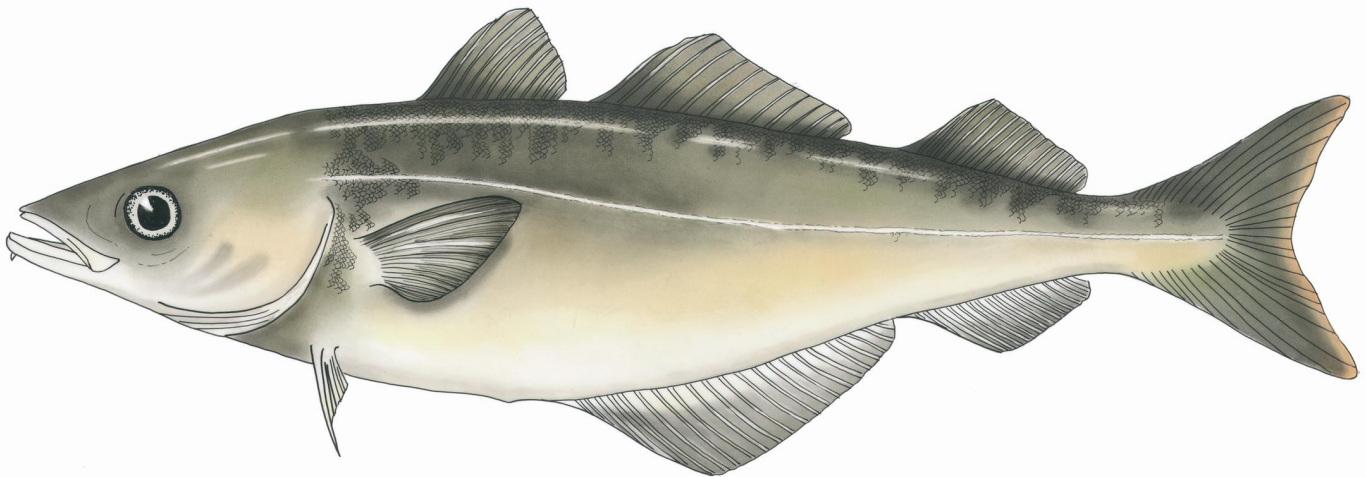
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American Pollock (Pollachius virens)

Family Gadidae, Cods



Common names: pollock, boston bluefish

Description: Pollock are olive green or black to brown above with paler sides and a silver belly. Their fairly straight lateral line is light colored. Pollock are deep, plump bodied fish that have three dorsal fins, two anal fins and a forked tail fin. They have a slightly projected lower jaw. Their chin barbel is considered minute and may be completely missing in older fish. Pollock average between 4 and 15 pounds in weight, although large ones can weigh to 35 pounds.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: cod, haddock

Remarks: Pollock are considered the most active members of the Cod family. When hooked, they make strong, powerful runs, thus making them fun to catch on light tackle. Their diet consists of small pelagic fish, comb jellies and various crustaceans. Good baits include shrimp, herring, squid, clams and marine worms. Fishing methods such as jigging, trolling and casting all work well when trying for pollock. Their meat is of good quality, but is not rated as high as that of cod or haddock.

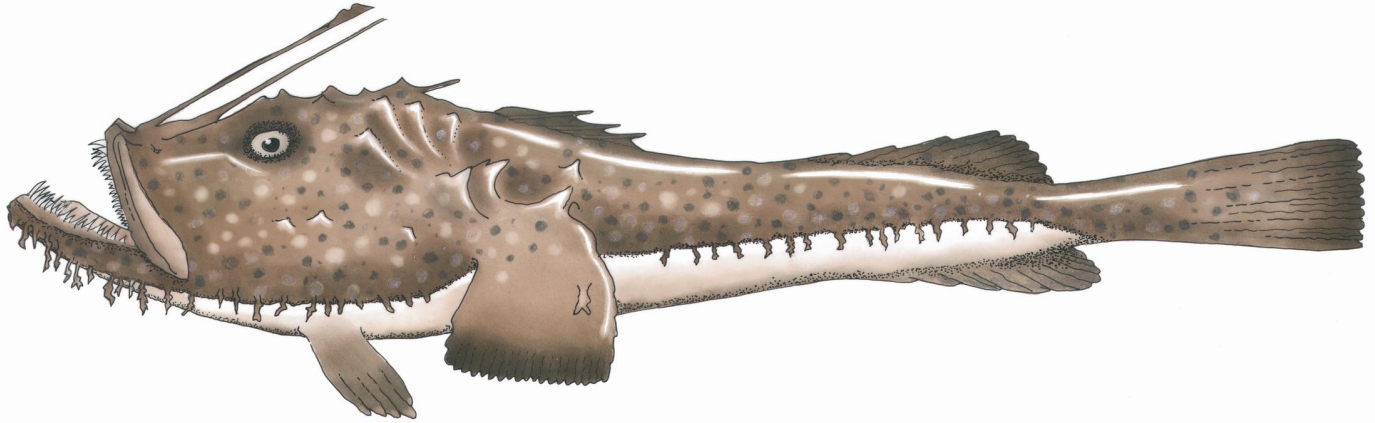
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Goosefish (*Lophius americanus*)

Family Lophiidae, Goosefishes



Common names: anglerfish, monkfish, goosefish

Description: Goosefish are tan to chocolate brown above, fading to a white shaded underbody. Their body is narrow and tapered with a flattened, broad head that supports an enormous mouth. Both of their jaws are armed with numerous long needle like teeth that point inward. Their lower jaw, head and sides are edged with a unique fringe of fleshy flaps and they lack gill slits. Distinctive pectoral fins, resembling a pair of small arms, help them to move along the bottom. Several slender spines and two well developed dorsal fins can be found on top of their body. The first spine serves as a modified fishing lure that attracts their unsuspecting prey toward their mouth. Goosefish can grow to a length of over 4 feet and weigh up to 50 pound

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: none

Remarks: Goosefish have enormous appetites and are capable of eating almost any kind of fish, bird or invertebrate that they can catch. Being bottom dwellers, they inhabit waters as shallow as a few feet to depths exceeding 1,200 feet. They can be found on all kinds of bottom types but prefer soft or sandy bottoms. Occasionally, anglers who are using live bait in search of other groundfish haul up a goosefish. Extra care should be taken when handling these fish because of the potential danger of their bite. The meat from a goosefish, sometimes referred to as "poorman's lobster," is both firm and free of bones and is considered a culinary treat.

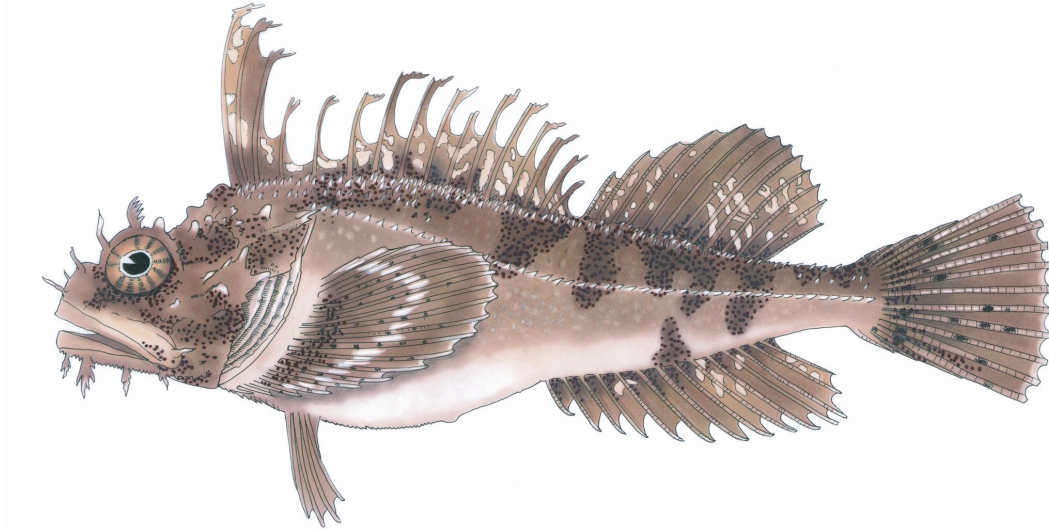
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Sea Raven (*Hemitripterus americanus*)

Family Cottidae, Sculpins



Common names: raven, sea raven

Description: Sea ravens may vary in color from blood red to reddish purple to yellow brown. Their belly is usually a shade of yellow. They have a large head and a stout, tapering body. Distinctive tabs of flesh hang from their head and lower jaw. A curious ragged layer of skin is also present on the first dorsal fin. Their pectoral fins are large and fan-like and they have a small tail fin. These fish have a broad mouth that is lined with several rows of very sharp teeth. Sea ravens often grow to be 18 to 20 inches in length.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: none

Remarks: Sea ravens frequent rocky or hard substrates at depths ranging from 6 feet to 300 feet. They are present throughout the water column and are considered voracious feeders. Their diet includes a variety of mollusks, crustaceans and fish. Sea ravens will take almost any bait. They are edible, but few are kept because of their ugly appearance.

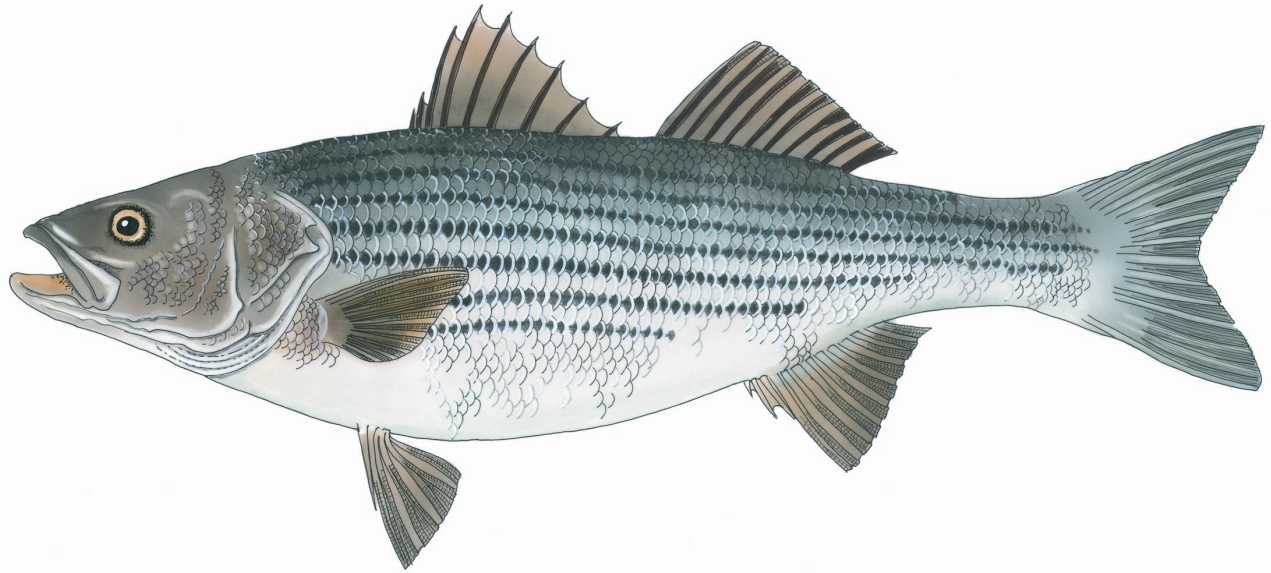
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Striped Bass (Morone saxatilis)

Family Percichthyidae, Temperate basses



Common names: striper, linesider, rockfish, sea bass

Description: Striped bass are dark olive green to steel blue on top, with silver colored sides and a white underbelly. Seven to eight dark stripes run longitudinally across their body giving them a distinctive appearance. Striped bass are usually three and one-third times as long as they are deep. They have a long head, protruding lower jaw and a moderately forked tail fin. Their dorsal fins are separated, unlike the dorsal fins of white perch, which they resemble when they are young.

Where found: inshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: white perch

Remarks: Striped bass are one of Maine's most important saltwater gamefish, being renowned for their powerful fight and excellent flavor. Inhabiting shallow bays, rocky shores, coastal rivers and the surf line of barrier beaches, they can be caught anytime during daylight hours but seem to be most active between sunset and sunrise. Stripers will hit a variety of baits, lures and flies. Mackerel, eels, marine worms, herring and menhaden are commonly used baits. Proven lures include spoons, lead-headed jigs and surface and deep diving plugs.

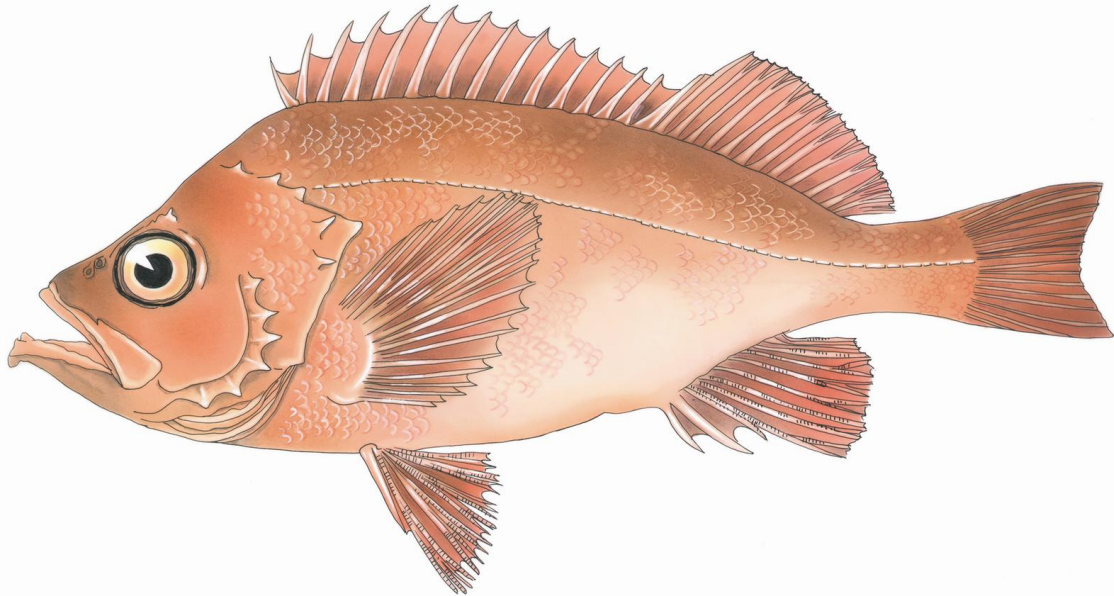
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Acadian Redfish (Sebastes fasciatus)

Family Scorpaenidae, Scorpionfishes



Common names: redfish, ocean perch

Description: Redfish are an orange to flame red above, fading to a paler hue below. These fish with large eyes are perch-like in appearance. Redfish have a flattened body that is three times longer than it is deep. Their mouth is large and is lined with many small teeth. One continuous dorsal fin runs from the nape of their neck to their caudal peduncle. Their tail fin is noticeably small.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: rosefish

Remarks: Redfish are slow growing fish. Ages in excess of 50 years and lengths of up to 18 to 20 inches have been noted. Considered a deep water fish, redfish can be found in shallower waters during the colder winter months. Redfish prefer a rocky bottom. Their diet includes a variety of crustaceans, mollusks and small fish. They are known to hit almost any bait. Although they are considered to be an excellent food fish, they offer the angler little in the way of a struggle when caught.

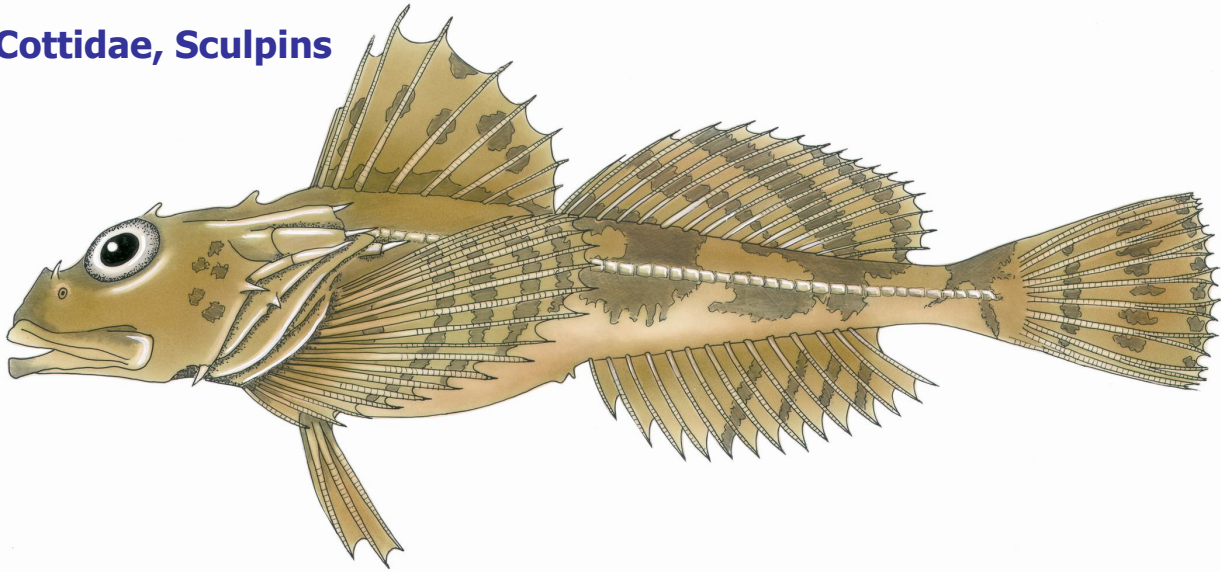
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Longhorn Sculpin (Myoxocephalus octodecemspinosus)

Family Cottidae, Sculpins



Common names: sculpin, hornpout, horndog

Description: Longhorn sculpin differ in color according to their surroundings. Their coloration may vary from dark olive to pale green yellow to green brown. As a rule, they are marked with three or four indefinite, irregular dark crossbars which run down their sides. Their underbelly is white. These fish have a large head and a slender body which is five and one-half times as long as it is deep. They also have large eyes, fan-like pectoral fins, two dorsal fins and a comparatively small tail fin. Their skull is covered with numerous sharp spines, the longest of which starts at their cheek and goes as far back as the edge of their gill cover. Longhorn sculpin can grow to 18 inches in length, although few of them ever get any longer than 10 to 14 inches.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: shorthorn sculpin

Remarks: Of the several species of sculpin living in the Gulf of Maine, longhorn sculpin are the most numerous. They are found at depths ranging from a few feet to over 300 feet. These fish have a voracious appetite and will readily take any type of bait that is presented. They are considered a nuisance by anglers who are after more desirable species of fish. Because their head is covered with spines, extra care should be taken when handling them.

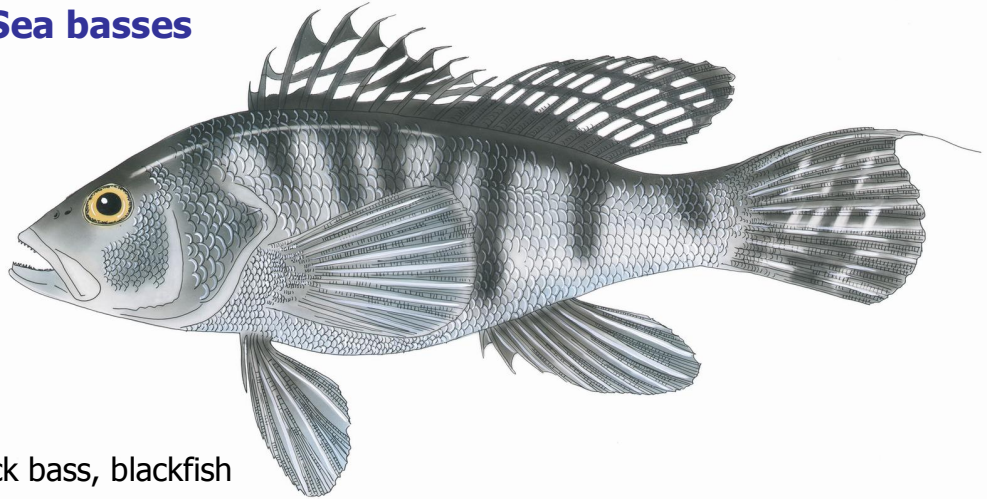
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Black Sea Bass (*Centropristis striata*)

Family Serranidae, Sea basses



Common names: black bass, blackfish

Description: Black sea bass are smoky gray to dusky brown to blue black above, with a belly that is only slightly paler than their sides. These colors may be more or less mottled. Several distinct whitish spots or bands mark their dorsal fin. These fish have a moderately stout body that is three times as long as it is wide. Their head is large and includes a mouth with a lower jaw that sticks out beyond their upper lip. A continuous, high dorsal fin is located on top of their body. Their tail fin is rounded and larger fish may possess an elongated filament that extends beyond their tail. Black sea bass can grow to 8 pounds in weight and measure more than 24 inches in length, although the average size is closer to 1 1/2 pounds.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: white perch, striped bass

Remarks: Throughout the coastal mid-Atlantic states black sea bass are prized as a valuable food and sportfish. Occasionally, they are known to enter into Maine's coastal waters. Their inshore/offshore range extends from depths of only a few feet out to waters as deep as 420 feet. These fish prefer a rocky bottom and especially like to congregate around piers, jetties and wrecks. Being bottom feeders, they are known to eat both crustaceans and mollusks as well as several kinds of small fish. Good baits include marine worms, shrimp, crabs, clams and cut fish. Mackerel jigs are also effective. When hooked black sea bass are determined fighters, making them a delight to catch on light tackle. Their meat is especially good to eat.

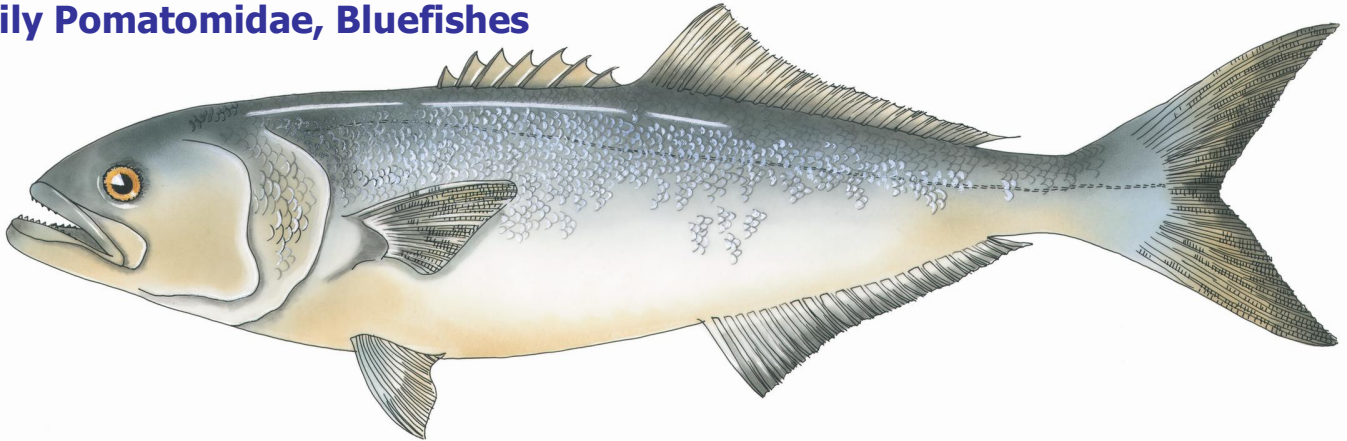
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Bluefish (Pomatomus saltatrix)

Family Pomatomidae, Bluefishes



Common names: blue, chopper, snapper

Description: Bluefish are a blue green shade above with silver sides and underbelly. A single dark blotch can be found at the base of each of their pectoral fins. They have large powerful jaws that are lined with a single row of small, razor-sharp teeth. Their bodies are stout and powerful. These fish have two dorsal fins, the first being much lower and rounder than the second which, in turn, is similar in size to the anal fin. Bluefish have a large forked tall fin that pushes them swiftly through water.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: none

Remarks: Swimming together in large schools, bluefish migrate north with warming water temperatures and generally, but not always, appear along Maine's coast during the summer months. They frequently follow other schools of fish, such as menhaden, mackerel and butterfish, upon which they feed. The preferred rig for blue fishing is a medium duty rod and reel equipped with at least twenty pound test line, coupled with a coated steel or heavy monofilament leader. Effective artificial lures include spoons, plugs and tube lures. Baits, either alive or cut, include mackerel, menhaden, butterfish and eels. An assortment of flies are also known to work well. Anglers should take extra care when handling bluefish because their bite can cause serious injury.

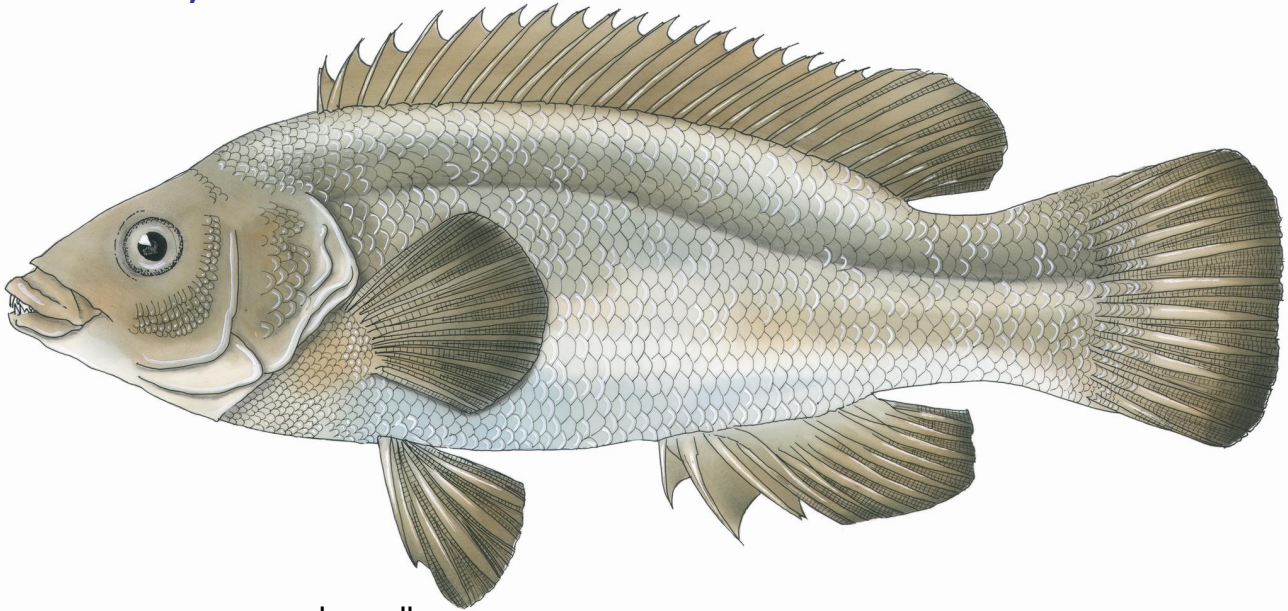
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Cunner (Tautoglabrus adspersus)

Family Labridae, Wrasses



Common names: cunner, bergall

Description: Cunnners range in color from mottled reddish to bluish brown on top, fading to slightly paler hues along their sides. These fish have a pointed snout and are moderately slender and deep bodied in shape. They have a single long dorsal fin and a very deep caudal peduncle. Their small mouth is lined with several rows of uneven cone shaped teeth. Cunner rarely grow over one foot in length. Their usual size is between 6 and 10 inches in length and less than 3 pounds in weight.

Where found: inshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: tautog

Remarks: Cunnners are considered a coastal fish with the majority of them living within 5 to 6 miles from shore. They are most often found around piers, rock jetties and eel grass beds. Being omnivores, they eat a variety of both plant and animal matter, including small lobsters, mussels, shrimp and sea urchins. Due to the small size of their mouth, the use of a very small hook is a must for anglers. Bits of clams, crabs, sea worms and even canned corn kernels work well as bait for these fish. Although cunnners have a tough skin, their meat is tasty, making them a popular pan fish.

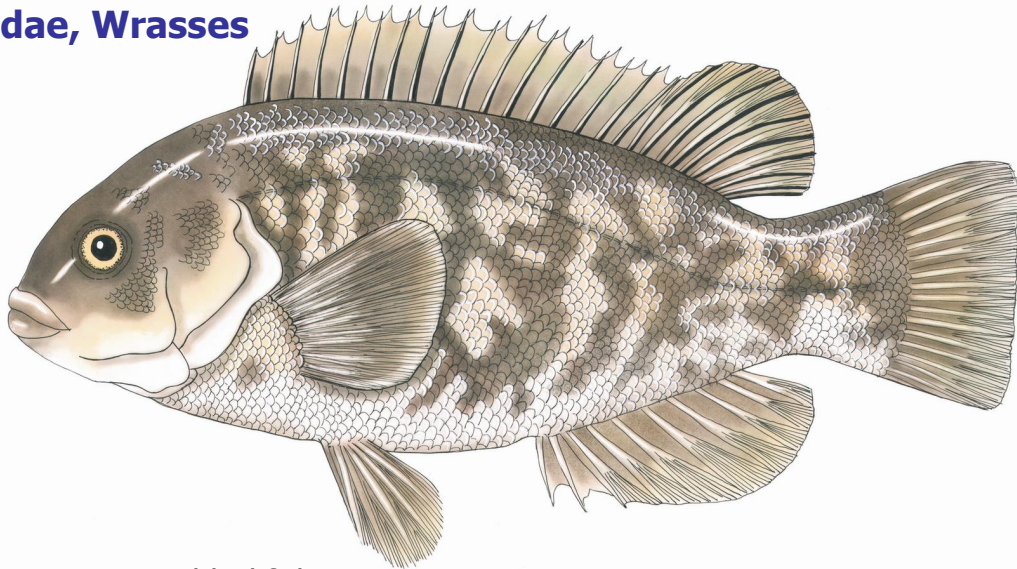
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Tautog (*Tautoga onitis*)

Family Labridae, Wrasses



Common names: tautog, blackfish, tog

Description: Tautog are usually a mottled brown to black shade on top with a white or gray chin and underbelly. They are stout in shape and have a blunt snout, long dorsal fin and a broad caudal peduncle. These fish are three times as long as they are deep. Their lips are thick and they have 2 to 3 canine teeth located toward the front of their mouth. Found at the rear of their mouth are more rounded molar-like teeth that they use for grinding. Tautog can grow to 3 feet in length and to around 22 pounds in weight, but their average size is closer to 2 to 4 pounds in weight.

Where found: inshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: cunner

Remarks: Tautog are occasionally caught along Maine's southwest coast. Common in the mid-Atlantic states, they are a popular inshore sportfish. These fish seldom frequent waters deeper than 60 feet and prefer a rocky bottom to set on. Areas around boulders, submerged wrecks, breakwaters and docks are all good places to fish for this species. Good baits include crabs, shrimp, clams, mussels and marine worms. Tautog are not an active fish, but when hooked put up a determined fight. Their firm white meat is considered to be of good quality, especially when used to make a chowder.

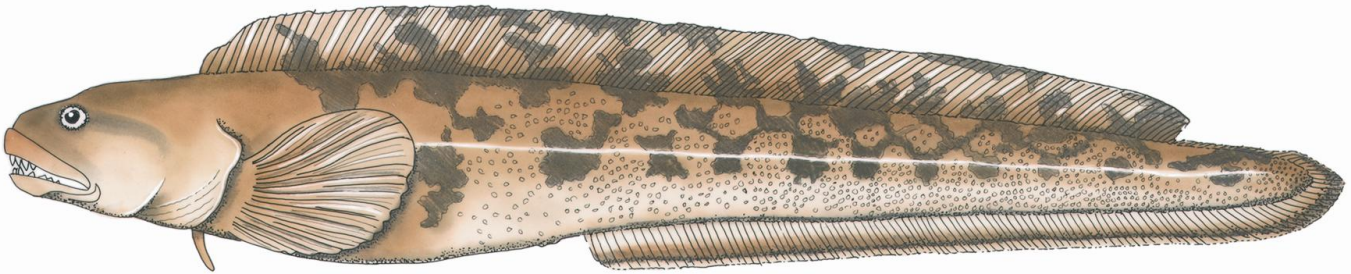
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Ocean Pout (Macrozoarces americanus)

Family Zoarcidae, Eelpouts



Common names: ocean pout, eel pout, conger eel

Description: Ocean pout have a muddy yellow to mottled reddish brown upper body that blends to a dirty white or yellowish underbody. They are eel-like in shape with a continuous dorsal fin that runs from the nape of the neck back to the tail fin, but does not connect to it. Conversely, the anal fin, which starts at mid body and runs back toward the tail fin, is connected to the tail fin. These fish have a wide, gaping mouth with thick, fleshy lips and jaws armed with strong, blunt, conical teeth. Their body is 8 times as long as it is deep. Ocean pout can grow to 42 inches in length and weigh around 12 pounds.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: cusk, wolffish

Remarks: Ocean pout are bottom dwellers that generally inhabit sand, mud or rocky substrate. They can be found in both inshore and offshore waters at depths ranging from 30 to 630 feet. These fish feed on a wide variety of mollusks, crustaceans and echinoderms, as well as other invertebrates. They will eat other fish, but lack the swimming skills to be effective hunters. Anglers who are trying for more popular species, such as cod or haddock, sometimes catch ocean pout. Their meat is reported to be sweet tasting.

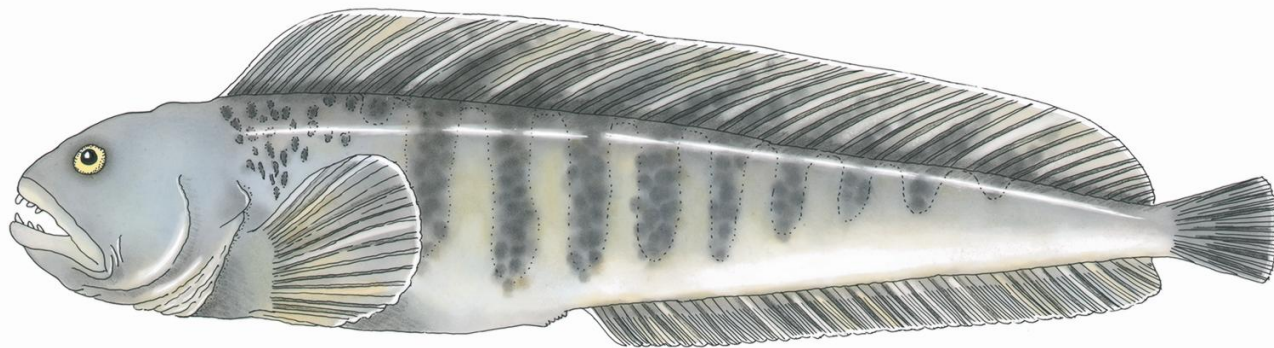
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Wolffish (Anarhichas lupus)

Family Anarhichadidae, Wolffishes



Common names: wolffish, ocean catfish

Description: Atlantic wolffish range in color from brownish olive (prior to sexual maturity) to light blue gray (sexually mature). Distinct, dark, irregular bands run transversely along their sides. Atlantic wolffish have an elongated shape. Their body, which is deepest at the nape of their neck, tapers back to a slender caudal peduncle and small weak tail fin. These fish have large, rounded pectoral fins, lack pelvic fins and do not have a lateral line. Their dorsal fin is uniform in height and extends from their neck area back to the base of their tail fin. Their anal fin is about half as long as their dorsal fin. Atlantic wolffish have exceptionally strong jaws equipped with large canine teeth and massive molars. These fish can grow to 5 feet in length, with the average size closer to 3 feet.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: spotted wolffish, cusk, eel pout

Remarks: Atlantic wolffish are solitary fish that are only found over a hard bottom at depths varying from a few feet to over 500 feet. They eat a variety of mollusks, echinoderms and crustaceans. Occasionally, anglers will hook onto one while fishing for more desirable species. Atlantic wolffish should not be ignored as table fare, for their sweet, firm meat has lobster-like qualities. Extra care should be taken when handling them, because their bite can cause serious injury.

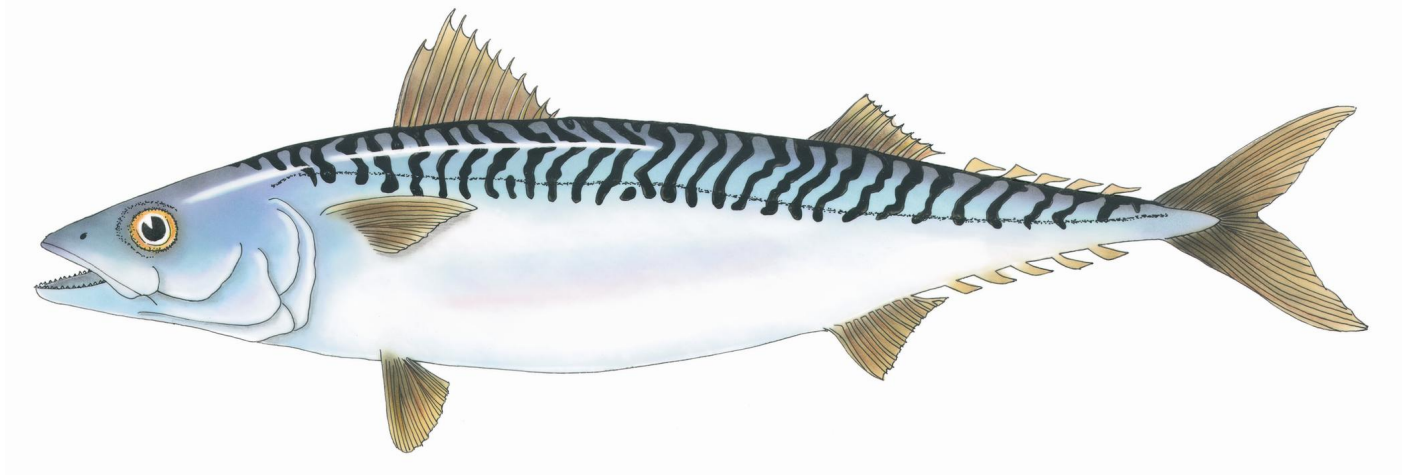
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Atlantic Mackerel (Scomber scombrus)

Family Scombridae, Mackerels



Common names: Mackerel, Boston mackerel, tinker

Description: Atlantic mackerel are iridescent blue green above with a silvery white underbelly. Twenty to thirty black bars run across the top half of their body, giving them a distinctive appearance. The efficient spindle shape of their body and their strong tall fin give this fish its ability to move swiftly through the water. Atlantic mackerel have two separate large dorsal fins and, like their relatives the tunas, they possess several dorsal and anal finlets. On average, Atlantic mackerel weigh less than one pound, but individuals of up to two pounds are not unusual.

Where found: Inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: Chub mackerel, bonito

Remarks: Atlantic mackerel are seasonal migrators that travel in dense schools. They appear in late spring in many of the state's harbors, coves and coastal rivers where they are sought by eager anglers. An ultra-light to light spinning rod outfitted with 10 to 12 pound or less test line provides anglers with the most action. Spoons, spinners, weighted bucktails, jigs and tube lures all work well. Atlantic mackerel are not only enjoyed as table fare, but are especially prized as bait for other game fish.

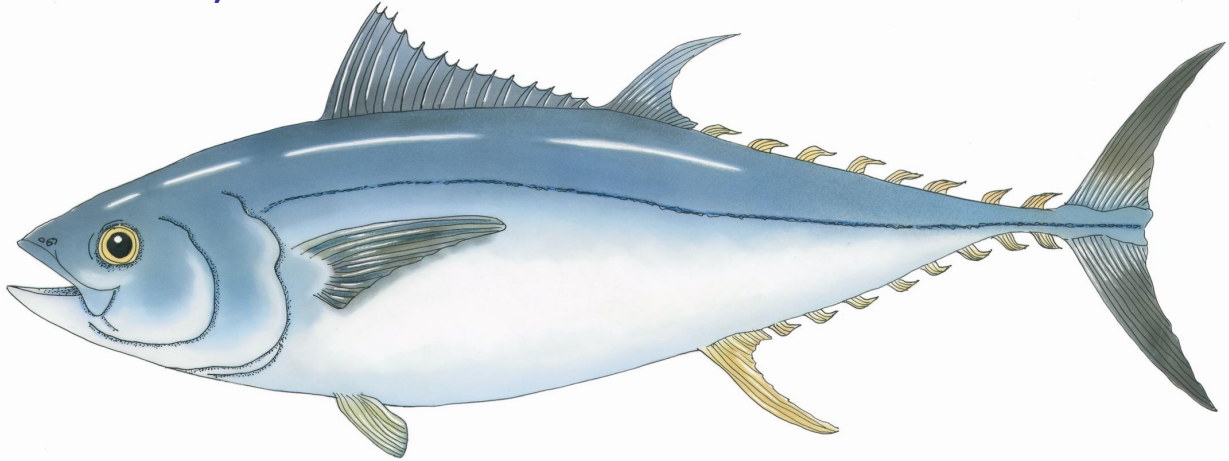
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Bluefin Tuna (Thunnus thynnus)

Family Scombridae, Mackerels



Common names: giant, tuna, horse mackerel

Description: Bluefin tuna are deep blue on top, blending to silver along their sides and belly. Their lack of additional dark markings helps to differentiate them when young from bonito. As with other members of the mackerel family, bluefin tuna have two dorsal fins, one anal fin, plus numerous dorsal and anal finlets. These fish are built for speed, having an efficient torpedo shaped body coupled with a lunate shaped tail fin. Bluefin tuna can grow to an enormous size with the largest examples weighing above 1,500 pounds and measuring close to 12 feet in length.

Where found: offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: none

Remarks: Bluefin tuna are pelagic fish that often travel in large schools, especially when they are young. Older fish in the 350 to 500 pound range tend to journey in smaller schools numbering from a few to as many as 40 members. The very largest fish tend to be mostly solitary. Bluefin tuna are built for speed and endurance and may reach speeds of over fifty miles per hour. Being seasonal migrators, tuna generally appear off Maine's coast by early summer. Tackle in the 80 to 130 weight class offers an angler the best chance of successfully landing one of these hard-fighting fish. Both trolling and bait fishing are popular ways to catch tuna. Effective baits include herring, butterfish, mackerel and squid.

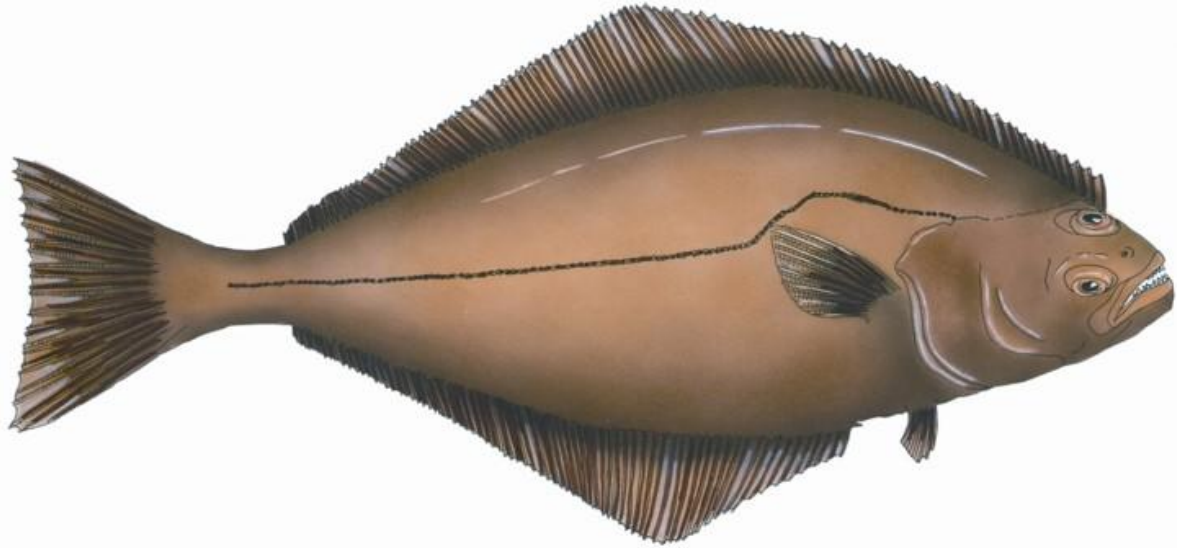
Records: MSSAR
IGFA All-Tackle World Record

Fish Illustrations by: Roz Davis Designs, Damariscotta, ME (207) 563-2286

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Atlantic Halibut (Hippoglossus hippoglossus)

Family Pleuronectidae, Righteye flounders



Common names: halibut, giant halibut, righteye flounder

Description: Atlantic halibut are chocolate to olive or gray brown on their right (upper) side and white on their left (under) side. Larger individuals may have dark blotches on their under side. Atlantic halibut are right-eyed flatfish, meaning both eyes are located on the dark colored, upper side of the fish. These fish have a compressed body, a lateral line that arches strongly above their pectoral fin and a concave shaped tail fin. Their large mouth is armed with sharp, curved teeth. Atlantic halibut can grow to enormous size making them the largest of all the flatfish. Individuals weighing from 600 to 700 pounds have been landed, although fish taken over 100 pounds are rare today.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: winter flounder

Remarks: Atlantic halibut are bottom dwellers, preferring a sand, gravel or clay covered substrate rather than one blanketed by soft mud or rock. Halibut, though slow to bite, are known to put up a strong fight and are excellent to eat.

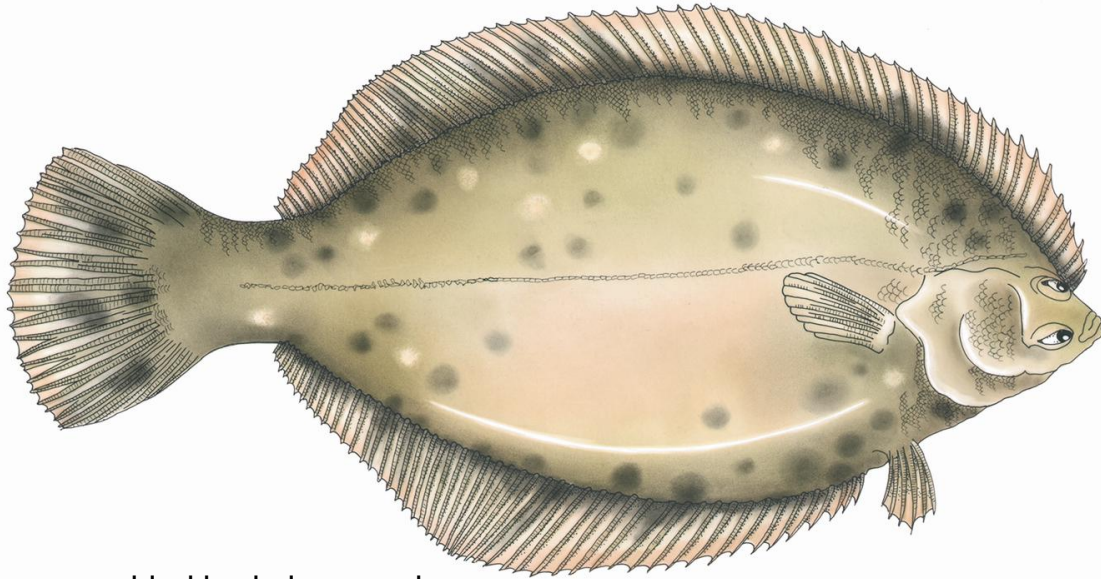
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Winter Flounder (Pleuronectes americanus)

Family Pleuronectidae, Righteye flounders



Common names: blackback, lemon sole

Description: Their color, which varies with the substrate they occupy, can range from reddish brown to olive green to almost black. Their underside is white. Winter flounder are deeply compressed in shape and have a small mouth. Their eyes are located on their right side, thus making them a right-sided flounder. They have an almost straight lateral line. The maximum size for this species is around 23 inches in length and about 6 pounds in weight.

Where found: inshore and offshore

Similar Gulf of Maine species: smooth flounder, witch flounder yellowtail, dab

Remarks: Winter flounder are the most common of the shallow water flounders. They frequent estuaries, coastal waters and offshore fishing banks. In Maine, they are a popular sportfish. A light to medium weight rod equipped with a suitable reel and loaded with 10 to 12 pound test line works well for this species. Lures for the most part have proven to be ineffective for flounder fishing. Favorite baits include marine worms and clams. Being the thickest and meatiest of all the flatfish smaller than the halibut, winter flounder are highly prized as a food fish.

Records: MSSAR
IGFA All-Tackle World Record

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