Atlantic Menhaden  
*Brevoortia tyrannus*—A small, flat, silvery fish that travels in large schools. It is a commercially important fish species in estuaries and coastal Atlantic waters, migrating north and south in large, very compact schools. Menhaden are harvested for production of oil, fertilizer, and fishmeal. Menhaden are sensitive to oxygen levels in the water, and regularly die off by the thousands when large schools enter confined waters in hot weather. They feed by filtering zooplankton and phytoplankton, and will also eat suspended organic plant matter. An important commercial baitfish, menhaden are also harvested for production of oil, fertilizer and fishmeal. Menhaden are sensitive to oxygen levels in the water, and regularly die off by the thousands when large schools enter confined waters in hot weather. They feed by filtering zooplankton and phytoplankton, and will also eat suspended organic plant matter. 

Length: up to 1 ½ feet 

Hickory Shad  
*Alosa hickory*—Also called hickory shad, this small fish has a prominent lower jaw that juts out. Highly migratory, during late spring and early summer schools of adults are found in marine waters along the eastern coast (including estuaries and tidal rivers). Anadromous, hickory shad spend the bulk of their time in the sea, only returning to freshwater to spawn. They eat small invertebrates (squam), crabs and small fish, as well as fish eggs. Hickory shad are sometimes used as bait for sea bass and bluefish. 

Length: up to 2 feet 

Hickory Shad  
*Alosa hickory*—Also called hickory shad, this small fish has a prominent lower jaw that juts out. Highly migratory, during late spring and early summer schools of adults are found in marine waters along the eastern coast (including estuaries and tidal rivers). Anadromous, hickory shad spend the bulk of their time in the sea, only returning to freshwater to spawn. They eat small invertebrates (squam), crabs and small fish, as well as fish eggs. Hickory shad are sometimes used as bait for sea bass and bluefish. 

Length: up to 2 feet 

New York’s marine waters are home to a wide variety of fish species. In fact, Long Island is ideally situated so that both southern and northern fish species frequent our waters. Anglers can fish for Atlantic cod, winter flounder and mackerel in the spring, or try their luck for bluefish, summer flounder and triggerfish during the summer months. Migratory in nature, many of the marine species that frequent New York’s waters travel long distances up and down the coast. 

Nearshore Saltwater Sportfish of New York
Black Sea Bass

Centropristis striata—Small-bodied fish; black sea bass have large pectoral and pelvic fins, and one long dorsal fin instead of separate spiny and soft-rayed fins. Small bass occur in bays, while larger ones are found offshore. They are one of the most popular bottom-fish species of the northeast Atlantic Coast. They move inshore in spring, frequenting artificial reefs, wrecks, rocks and pilings. Sea bass eat a variety of bottom-dwelling species, including crabs, fishes, squids and worms. Anglers like their firm, white flesh, using bait such as squid or clams to catch them.

Max weight: 10 pounds, but average is only 1 pound

Atlantic Herring

Clupea harengus—Atlantic herring are laterally compressed, streamlined, silvery fish with blunt or slightly bluntnose backs. They have a slightly saw-toothed belly and a longer lower jaw that extends past the top jaw. They travel along the coast in large schools, feeding primarily on copepods. They spend the day in deeper water, but rise to the surface at night. Many popular gamefish species, as well as other marine mammals, are dependent upon these herring as a food source. Herring are caught during the colder months by anglers using light tackle.

Length: up to 17 inches

Striped Bass

Morone saxatilis—Striped bass are moderate-sized, bottom-dwelling fish. Their speed, power and large size make them a favorite of anglers. Anadromous, they move from the sea to freshwater in spring. They frequently occur around rocky areas near jetties and dropoffs. They are migratory, seasonally entering New York’s tidal portion of the Hudson River and coastal waters around Long Island. Smaller bass generally occur around rocky areas near jetties and reefs. Usually solitary or found in small groups, they eat benthic invertebrates such as mollusks and crustaceans. A visitor from the south, triggerfish inhabit bays, harbors and reefs. Usually solitary or found in small groups, they eat benthic invertebrates such as mollusks and crustaceans. Anadromous, they use their conical teeth to eat a variety of mollusks and crustaceans. Cunners are not popular with many New York anglers because of their small size and tendency to steal bait.

Length: up to 10 inches

Scup or Porgy

Stenotomus chrysops—Scup are a small, elongate, flat-tailed fish inhabiting sandy bottoms of estuaries out to deep water. They use modified pectoral fins to move along the bottom to forage prey such as crustaceans, bivalves, squid and other fish. Scup are good targets for anglers because of their ability to use their swim bladders to produce sound. They are used for bait and in pet food and fertilizer. Although some anglers enjoy eating scup, most consider them a nuisance because they compete with more desirable species for the hooked bait.

Length: the largest striped scup ever recorded was taken in Long Island Sound. It was 19.6 inches long and weighed 3.4 pounds

American Eel

Anguilla rostrata—Has a long, slender un likeness. body covered with small, embedded scales, giving it a slippery feeling. The dorsal and anal fins are connected to the tail so that it appears to have one continuous fin wrapped around the end of its body. American eels are born in the Sargasso Sea near Bermuda, and take nearly a year to reach New York’s shores. Females leave the males at river mouths and ascend upstream, spending up to 18 years in freshwater before returning to the sea to spawn. The commercial catch is largely exported to Europe and Japan, where the fish are smoked, dried, or cooked in olive oil and vinegar. Small eels are sold as live bait for striped bass.

Average length: 2 - 3 feet

Bluefish

Pomatomus saltatrix—Bluefish have a stout body and large mouth that is fully arched with sharp triangular teeth. Aggressive predators, they sometimes continue to capture prey long after their hunger is satisfied. Their feeding behavior is legendary, frequently driving schools of prey fish into shallow areas where it is easier to rope or catch them. Normally migrating north and south, they usually travel in large schools. Popular sportfish, blues are great fighters. Anglers fish from boat and shore, using a variety of plugs, lures and cast bait. Because of the sharp teeth, use wire leaders. Young blues are called "snapper."

Length: up to 3½ feet; weight: up to 25 pounds

Text by Eileen Stegeman & Ron Gelardi
Graphics by Frank Herec
Underwater photography by Susan Shafer
*Smithsonian Institution, NMNH, Division of Fishes