



J. H. Blake\*

**Little Skate**

*Leucoraja erinacea*—A small skate with dark spots on its dorsal surface, the little skate is usually found on sandy or gravelly bottoms in water depths ranging from shallow shoals to nearly 1,000 feet. It is mostly active under dark conditions, but is frequently caught during the day by anglers fishing for fluke. Although primarily a bottom feeder, mostly eating mollusks, it will also swim up to capture and devour small fish near the surface. This fish is increasingly popular as food, but is also used as bait for lobsters.

**Length: 12-20 inches**



Sherman Foote Denton

**Atlantic Menhaden**

*Brevoortia tyrannus*—Also called bunker, mossbunker or pogey, Atlantic menhaden belong to the herring family. They are one of the most abundant fish species in estuary and coastal Atlantic waters, migrating north and south in large, very compact schools. 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**



**Northern Puffer**

*Sphoeroides maculatus*—Also called blowfish or swellfish, the puffer gets these names from its ability to inflate its body with air or water. When alarmed or even touched, the puffer uses a special sac that is a ventral extension of the stomach to quickly expand to a very large size, protecting it from enemies. When left alone, it soon deflates. Puffers inhabit bays, estuaries and protected coastal waters, eating primarily shellfish and an occasional finfish. Unlike some of its cousins, the meat of the northern puffer is non-toxic.

**Length: 10-14 inches**



Nim Lee

**Summer Flounder or Fluke**

*Paralichthys dentatus*—A flatfish, summer flounder have both eyes on one side of their heads, are colored only on the eyed side, and swim on their sides. They have large mouths and sharp canine teeth which they use to eat small fishes, squid, sea worms, shrimp and other crustaceans. Fluke are called left-eyed flatfish because their eyes are on the upper surface of the head when the fish is facing left. Bottom-dwelling predators, they rely on their flattened shape and ability to change color and pattern to surprise prey. Moving inshore in the spring, fluke prefer sand or mud bottoms, but will remain around wharf pilings or other structure. When threatened, they quickly bury themselves in the sand or swim away. Anglers use baited bottom rigs to catch fluke.

**Average length: 18 inches; average weight: 3 pounds**

# Nearshore Saltwater Sportfish OF NEW YORK



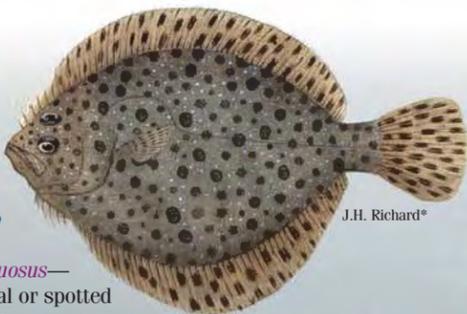
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Reprinted from the New York State Conservationist, April 2007



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J.H. Richard\*

**Windowpane Flounder**

*Scophthalmus aquosus*—

Also called sundial or spotted flounder, the windowpane is a highly compressed, left-sided flatfish (eyes on upper surface of the head when the fish is facing left) with numerous small, irregular, lighter or darker blotches on its head, sides and fins. It is a year-round resident, found over sandy areas in nearshore waters out to deep waters. Like all flounders, both eyes are on one side, there is coloration on the top side only and it swims on its side. In New York, the windowpane is of little importance as a food or game fish, though it is sometimes caught while angling for fluke.

**Length: up to 19 inches**

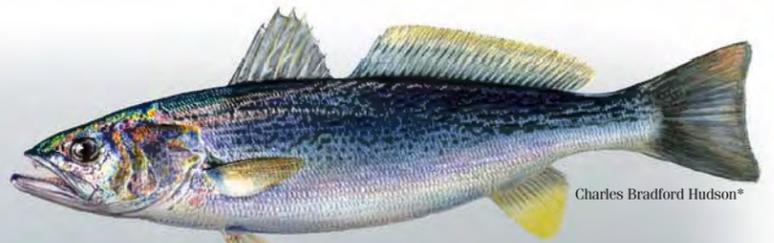


**Hickory Shad**

*Alosa mediocris*—

Silvery, with a dark grayish-green back, hickory shad have 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 (squid), crabs and small fish, as well as fish eggs. Hickory shad are sometimes used as bait for striped bass and bluefish.

**Length: up to 2 feet**



Charles Bradford Hudson\*

**Weakfish**

*Cynoscion regalis*—Weakfish are long, slender fish with dark spots or wavy lines on their back and sides. They get their name from their tender (or weak) skin around the mouth which tears easily when hooked. Weakfish enter New York's waters in spring and head south in fall. They are schooling fish and prefer shallow, sandy-bottom areas along beaches, in the mouths of inlets, and in estuaries. Weakfish are predatory and feed mostly on invertebrates and other fish. Anglers fish on the bottom with a variety of baits (squid, worms) and artificial lures (bucktails, diamond jigs) to catch these tasty fish. These fish are most active during times of low light and at night.

**Length: up to 3 feet; weight: up to 17 pounds**



Charles Bradford Hudson\*

**Winter Flounder**

*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*—Like fluke, winter flounder are flatfish, characterized by both eyes on one side of their heads, coloration on their top side only, and swimming on their sides. However, they differ from fluke in that winter flounder have small mouths, thick fleshy lips, tiny teeth, and are right-eyed flatfish (both eyes on the upper surface of the head when the fish is facing right). They get their name from the fact that they go into deep water in the summer and reappear in shoal waters during the winter. They prefer sand or muddy bottoms near shellfish beds and grassy areas, eating shrimps, amphipods, crabs, sea urchins and snails. Anglers fish for them on the bottom with mussels or seaworms.

**Length: up to 25 inches; weight: up to 8 pounds**



Charles Bradford Hudson\*

**Tautog or Blackfish**

*Tautoga onitis*—Tautog or blackfish are dark-colored, stout-bodied fish with thick rubbery lips and a long continuous dorsal fin. In spring, they move from deep into shallow local waters, preferring rocky sheltered areas near reefs, pilings, jetties and wrecks, or around mussel beds. Tautogs have blunt conical teeth used for crushing barnacles, mussels, snails, crabs, shrimps and lobsters. Because tautogs are bottom feeders, anglers use bottom rigs baited with crabs or clams.

**Max length: 3 feet; max weight: 25 pounds**

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.



**Black Sea Bass**

*Centropristis striata*—Stout-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 bluish or greenish-blue 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 dependant 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*—Stripers are important sport and commercial fish. Their speed, power and large size make them a favorite of anglers. Anadromous, they move from the sea to freshwater to spawn. 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 travel in large schools; larger bass usually move in small pods. Adult stripers are voracious feeders, primarily eating fish and invertebrates, especially crabs and squid. Anglers have the best luck either trolling or drifting with large plugs, spoons, bait or eels, or surf fishing with casting plugs, spoons or jigs.

**Length: up to 4 1/2 feet; weight: up to 70 pounds**



**Northern Kingfish**

*Menticirrhus saxatilis*—Small shore fish usually found over a sandy bottom, northern kingfish only venture north in the summer. They are sometimes called king whiting, and are common in the surf zone and in estuaries, feeding on worms and crustaceans. Although kingfish are small in size, anglers consider them an excellent food fish.

**Length: up to 20 inches; weight: up to 3 pounds**



**Atlantic Cod**

*Gadus morhua*—Bottom dwellers, cod occur along sand and rock bottoms, and around reefs and shipwrecks from 100 to 1,500 feet down. Once common in New York, they can grow immense, with one fish recorded at nearly 6 feet long and more than 200 pounds. Atlantic cod feed in groups, eating fishes, mollusks, worms, crustaceans and seaweeds. Anglers use fresh shucked clams to catch cod over wrecks or rough bottom in 100-300 feet of water.

**Average length: 2-3 feet; average weight: 10-20 pounds**



**Striped Searobin**

*Prionotus evolans*—Striped searobins inhabit sandy bottom areas of inshore estuaries out to deep water up to 300 feet. They have large bony heads with ridges and spines, and unusual wing-like pectoral fins. Bottom-dwellers, they use modified rays on their pectoral fins to move and stir-up the bottom to find prey such as crustaceans, bivalves, squid and other fish. Searobins get their name from 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 searobins, most anglers consider them a nuisance because they compete with more desirable species for the hooked bait.

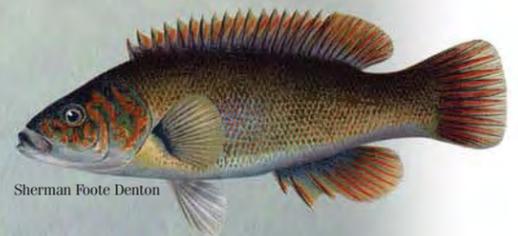
**Length:** the largest striped searobin ever recorded was taken in Long Island Sound; it was 19.6 inches long and weighed 3.4 pounds.



**Atlantic Mackerel** *Scomber scombrus*—

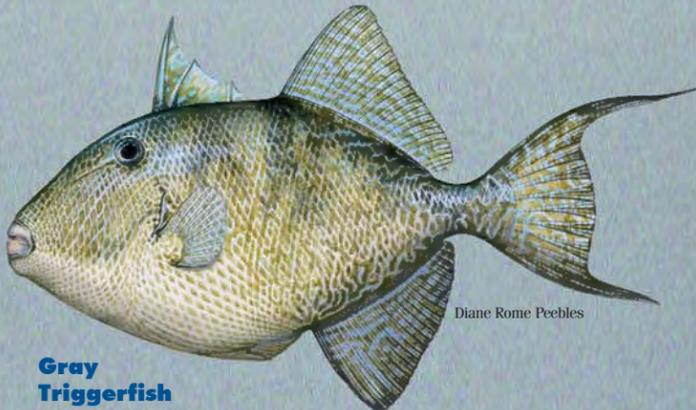
The Atlantic mackerel has a streamlined body and powerful fins that enable it to swim at high speeds. It travels in large schools, with a single school stretching for as long as several miles. Voracious feeders, mackerel cruise near the water's surface, feeding on smaller fish. Anglers use multi-lure rigs (called mackerel trees) to catch migrating mackerel off Long Island in March or November.

**Length: up to 2 feet; weight: up to 7 pounds**



**Cunner** *Tautoglabrus adspersus*—Also called bergall, cunner are moderately slender with a pointed snout. They are variable in color, often taking on the colors of their surroundings. They occur in small groups or schools, preferring shallow coastal waters, in eelgrass, around pilings, wrecks and rock piles. Omnivorous, they use their conical teeth to eat a variety of mollusks and crustaceans. Cunnners are not popular with many New York anglers because of their small size and tendency to steal bait.

**Length: up to 15 inches**



**Gray Triggerfish**

*Balistes capriscus*—Deep bodied, laterally flattened fish, gray triggerfish inhabit bays, harbors and reefs. Usually solitary or found in small groups, they eat benthic invertebrates such as mollusks and crustaceans. A visitor from the south, triggerfish are generally encountered in the summer and early fall. Anglers love this fish's meat, preferring it fresh or smoked. This fish can give careless anglers a nasty bite.

**Length: up to 2 feet**



**American Eel**

*Anguilla rostrata*—Has a long, slender snakelike 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 10 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, jellied, 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*—Adult bluefish have a stout body and large mouth that is fully armed 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 cripple or catch them. Annually 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 cut bait. Because of the sharp teeth, use wire leaders. Young bluefish are called 'snapper.'

**Length: up to 3 1/2 feet; weight: up to 25 pounds**

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\*Smithsonian Institution, NMNH, Division of Fishes