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SPECIES DIRECTORY

Atlantic Menhaden

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Atlantic Menhaden

Brevoortia tyrannus



Also Known As
Fatback, Bunker, Pogle, Mossback

Quick Facts

WEIGHT	Up to approx. 1 pound (at maturity)
LENGTH	Up to approx. 15 inches
LIFESPAN	Up to 10 to 12 years
REGION	New England/Mid-Atlantic, Southeast

About the Species

Found in coastal and estuarine waters from Nova Scotia to northern Florida, Atlantic menhaden play many important roles. They are filter feeders, primarily consuming phytoplankton and zooplankton in the water column. Menhaden support an important commercial fishery. They constitute the largest landings, by volume, along the Atlantic Coast of the United States. Menhaden are harvested for use as fertilizers, animal feed, and bait for fisheries including blue crab and lobster. They are a major source of omega-3 fatty acids, so they are also used to develop human and animal supplements. In estuaries like the [Chesapeake Bay](#), they are food for striped bass and other fish, as well as for predatory birds, including osprey and eagles.



Population Status

- The [most recent stock assessment](#)  was accepted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in February 2020. **The assessment says that Atlantic menhaden are not overfished and that overfishing is not occurring.**

Appearance

- Menhaden are silvery in color with a distinct black shoulder spot behind their gill opening.

Biology

- Menhaden can live to be 10 to 12 years old and reach 15 inches in length. Fully grown, they weigh about a pound.
- Menhaden eat both phytoplankton and zooplankton. When they are well-fed, they are referred to as fatbacks or bunkers.
- Mature menhaden spawn in coastal waters off the East Coast of the United States. The peak of their spawning season is thought to be from December to February.
- Menhaden larvae drift into estuarine environments and metamorphosize into juveniles. The juveniles tend to stay in the estuarine environments—like the Chesapeake Bay and Delaware Bay—for approximately a year before leaving the estuary to join adult schools.
- While many menhaden are migratory, others do not migrate and stay resident in their area.

Where They Live

- Menhaden live in coastal and estuarine waters from Nova Scotia to northern Florida.
- In the Chesapeake Bay, menhaden are common in all salinities. They swim in large schools close to the water's surface during the spring, summer, and fall.

Fishery Management

- The Atlantic menhaden fishery is managed by the [Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's \(ASMFC\)](#)  Atlantic Menhaden Management Board.
- Atlantic menhaden stock assessments and management are currently focused on implementing ecological reference points. These are fishing targets based on the availability of menhaden as prey for other important fishery species, including striped bass, weakfish, bluefish, and spiny dogfish, while also accounting for other prey species, such as Atlantic herring.

Scientific Classification

Kingdom

Animalia

Phylum	Chordata
Class	Actinopterygii
Order	Clupeiformes
Family	Clupeidae
Genus	<i>Brevoortia</i>
Species	<i>tyrannus</i>

Last updated by NOAA Fisheries on 02/20/2025

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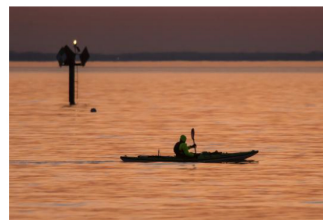
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