

ATLANTIC MENHADEN

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Distribution

Brevoortia tyrannus, commonly called the Atlantic Menhaden, can be found anywhere in the western Atlantic, Nova Scotia, Canada and southward to Indian River, Florida, USA. Menhaden are also common in all salinities of the Chesapeake Bay.

Appearance

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

Habitat

Mainly they can be found at a depth of up to -20m. This puts them in the pelagic, brackish, marine area of the Atlantic Ocean.

Life Span

Menhaden can live to be 10 to 12 years old. When they are well-fed, they are referred to as fatbacks or bunkers.

Threat

Menhaden have been consistently overfished for more than a century for their commercial use.

Features

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.

Significance

- They are food for bigger fish like striped bass and weakfish; marine mammals including whales and dolphins; and birds like bald eagles, great blue herons and brown pelicans.
- They are nutrient-rich, a good source of omega-3 fatty acids.
- They are a mainstay of the commercial fishing industry.

Concerns

- Removal of such large quantities of fish from the bay is degrading the ecosystem, making it harder for species like osprey and striped bass to survive and thrive.
- The decline threatens to disrupt coastal and marine food webs and affect thousands of fishing businesses.