

This month.....

BUTTERFISH

(Shiner, Butters, Dollarfish) *Peprilus triacanthus*

Color: Greyish blue on back with silvery sides and belly, and numerous irregular dark spots

Size: 6 to 9 inches long; weighs less than 1/2 pound

Habitat: Sheltered bays and estuaries, sandy bottoms; prefer areas of high salinity

Seasonal Appearance: Late April to August

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

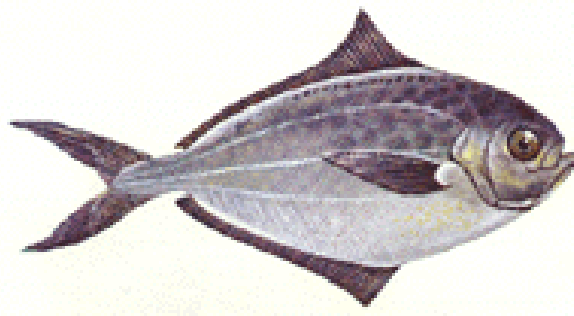
The butterfish is a small, round fish distinguishable by its thin, deep body and lack of pelvic or ventral fins. It resembles a flounder swimming on its edge. The butterfish has a soft-rayed dorsal fin running along the length of its back and an anal fin almost as long. Its tail is deeply forked, and the pectoral fins are long and pointed.

The butterfish has a small mouth with a single row of weak teeth and a concealed upper lip. Its snout is heavy and rounded, and the large eyes are rimmed with fatty tissue. Butterfish scales are quite small and will easily slough off when touched.

Butterfish travel in large schools, preying on small pelagic fish, shrimp, squid, and sometimes jellyfish and comb jellies. Young butterfish are often seen taking shelter among the tentacles of sea nettles and other jellyfish, apparently immune to the toxins in the stinging tentacles.

The butterfish matures after the first year, but rarely lives past the age of three. The young fish stays close to the shore during the first year of its life, preferring areas of high salinity to the fresher estuarine waters.

Butterfish found in Narragansett Bay are part of a larger population of butterfish that migrate along the Atlantic coastline from southern New England to Cape Hatteras. They migrate out of the Bay to deeper waters in late fall as water temperatures cool. When in the Bay, the butterfish swims near the surface, particularly over sandy-bottom habitats.



RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE

Butterfish are important food fish and have been harvested commercially since the 1800's. In the early 1900's, they were used primarily as fertilizer but were discovered to be a fish suitable for eating as well.

Often used as bait in recreational fishing, butterfish is a favorite food source for large game fish such as tuna. They are considered underexploited as a fish resource, and are currently under a Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Plan that limits the amount of fish that can be harvested each year in an effort to prevent overexploitation of the species.

HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY

RISAA members can purchase their own copy of *The Uncommon Guide To Common Life on Narragansett Bay* for \$15 from the RISAA Merchandise Committee. Stop by the committee table at any monthly RISAA meeting.



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