

## This Month

# Winter Flounder

**Common Nicknames:** Blackback Flounder, Right-eyed Flounder, Flatfish  
**Scientific Name:** *Pseudopleuronectes americanus*



**Field Markings:** Adults vary in color from shades of dark brown to gray or olive green; may have mottled blotches and light specks. Juveniles are lighter and have more spotting.  
**Size:** Averages 12 inches long

**Habitat:** Open water, muddy and sandy bottom

**Seasonal Appearance:** Year-round; most common in winter for spawning

### DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

The body of the winter flounder is oval-shaped, flat and thick. Beginning life with eyes on either side of its head, the left eye migrates to the right side within a few weeks, thus earning the name, "right-eyed" flounder. The eyes remain close together on the upper side of the winter flounder. The left, or blind side, of the fish is white and faces the bottom.

Unlike other Bay flounder, winter flounder have rough scales and a small mouth, with thick, puckered lips and small rows of slightly tough, flattened teeth. These fish can change color to blend in with the bottom, but are generally much darker than most of the Bay flatfish.

Narragansett Bay and nearby coastal ponds are important spawning areas for winter flounder. Mature adults migrate from deeper waters in the Bay and Rhode Island Sound into shallower waters during late fall. Spawning occurs from late December into April. They deposit clusters of sinking in slow-flowing coves and embayments. Juvenile fish remain in shallow nursery areas for two to three years before migrating to deeper water. Winter flounder are the only Bay flatfish that spend their entire early life in the estuary.

Winter flounder prefer sandy or muddy bottoms and are sometimes found near eelgrass beds, but can also be found on

many other bottom types. They are omnivores and feed on shrimp, crustaceans, amphipods, larval fish, mollusks, worms and some types of seaweeds and plants.

### RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE

Winter flounder were once one of the more important recreational and commercial fish species in Narragansett Bay. Because winter flounder spends the majority of its life in estuarine environments, this species is affected by both habitat degradation and overfishing.

The winter flounder population decreased dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1992, the catch numbers reached an all-time low. A Bay-wide ban on fishing winter flounder went into effect in 1991. Although some fishing has been permitted, strict regulations will continue until local stocks recover. Warming winter water temperatures have increased sand shrimp predation of juvenile winter flounder, which may explain some of the decline of winter flounder populations in Narragansett Bay.

### 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.



## Captain's License

pass our test - no test with USCG



**6-Pack  
Master 100GT  
Master Upgrade  
Launch**

RI & CT approved: 1 DAY SAFE BOATING

[www.boatwise.com](http://www.boatwise.com)

**800-698-7373**



Manufacturer of Fine  
Terminal Tackle for the  
Saltwater Fisherman

Snelled Hooks, Top and  
Bottom Rigs, Lures, Tubes,  
Leadheads, Umbrella Rigs  
and more....

P.O. Box 763  
Londonderry, NH 03053  
Tel: 603-434-4689  
Fax: 603-432-3902  
E-mail:  
[seawolfe2000@hotmail.com](mailto:seawolfe2000@hotmail.com)

Check out our web site at  
[www.seawolfe.com](http://www.seawolfe.com)

Owned and operated by  
**Richard and Judy Wolfe**