

SAVE THE BAY.
NARRAGANSETT BAY

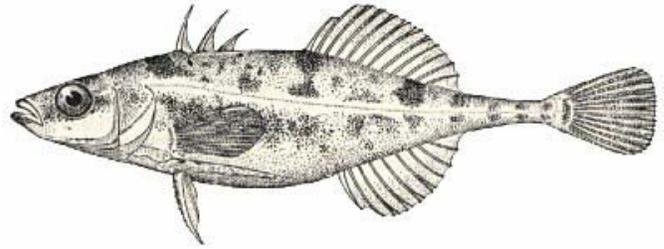
Uncommon Guide to Common Life on Narragansett Bay

A continuing series that describes the common fish, invertebrates, plants, water birds and marine mammals that share our Bay.

This Month

Fourspine Stickleback

Common Nicknames: Stickleback
Scientific name: *Apeltes quadracus*



Color: Olive or green-brown with dark mottling that alternates below the lateral line. Silver white belly with red ventral fin membranes. Males are usually darker than females

Size: 1.5 to 2.5 inches long

Habitat: Salt marshes, tidal creeks, underwater vegetation, near-shore environments

Seasonal Appearance: All year

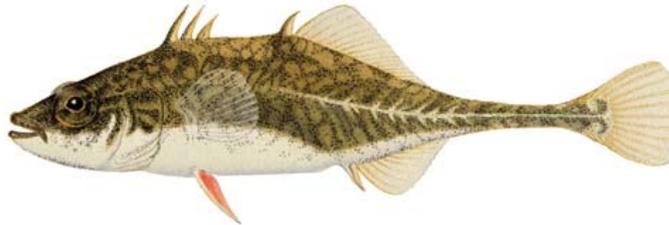
Distinguishing Features and Behaviors

The stickleback is a tiny fish readily identified by the presence of two or more short spines along its back, just in front of its dorsal fin. These spines can be raised or retracted at will, and are usually used for defense. The number of dorsal spines found on the back determines the species of stickleback.

The fourspine stickleback is the most common in the Bay, but two other species, the threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*) and the ninespine stickleback (*Pungitius pungitius*) are also found.

Distinguishing between the threespine and fourspine is sometimes difficult because the last spine is actually part of the soft dorsal fin. The threespine stickleback only has two visible spines, and the fourspine stickleback has three that are visible. The fourspine stickleback is scaleless, while the threespine stickleback has armor plates along the sides of its body.

Both species are small and slender with a flattened belly.



The ninespine has anywhere from seven to twelve spines.

The diet of sticklebacks is composed of copepods and other small planktonic crustaceans.

The stickleback spawns in early May through late July. The male stickleback carries weeds, leaves, and grasses that are cemented together in its mouth with mucus threads. The fish uses these materials to build a nest, then leads its mate there to spawn. The nest of the threespined stickleback is round, while the fourspine's nest is cone-shaped.

After the female lays eggs in the nest, the male fertilizes them and guards the nest during the six-day incubation period. The male stickleback removes dead eggs from the nest and returns any live eggs that fall out. Male fish will protect the newly hatched fish until they can survive on their own. Most males die after the spawning season, and those that do survive return to sea with the females.

Relationship To People

A common fish in salt marshes, sticklebacks are often found in the same areas where mummichogs and silversides are present. Although it can often be found in freshwater, the fourspine stickleback is primarily a brackish or saltwater fish.

Sticklebacks have no commercial value in the United States, but in some European and Scandinavian countries they are so plentiful that they are harvested for the oil that is present in their bodies.

THE Fisherman
Get It ALL For Just **.59¢ Per Week**

SPRING KICKOFF WIN THE BOAT!
DREAM BOAT MOST CHANCES TO WIN!
PRIME TIME IN THE FLORIDA KEYS
GEAR UP NOW FOR SURF & OFFSHORE

Win* a Cobia in our Dreamboat Fishing Challenge

Weekly Home Delivery
Premium Online Access theFisherman.com

*See official Dreamboat rules at theFisherman.com

www.fishermansline.com

Gibbs Cures SINCE 1948
Hopkins

HATS - BOOKS REELS
Kastmaster Many More
P.O. Box 236, Assonet, MA 02702