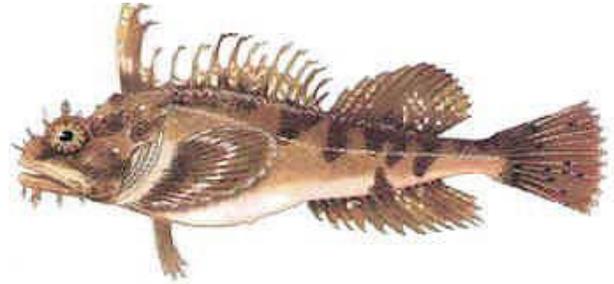


This Month

Atlantic Sea Raven

Common Nicknames: Sea raven, sailfin, sculpin
Scientific name: *Hemitripterus americanus*



Field Markings: Light to dark brown, gray and mottled to camouflage

Size: up to 25 inches and 7 pounds

Habitat: Rocky or hard-bottomed areas

Seasonal Appearance: Year-round

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

The Atlantic sea raven is easily distinguishable by its head and body covering of small spines (also called “prickles”). The spines are derived from modified, platelike scales that, along with fleshy protrusions from the fish’s head, help the fish to blend in with the Bay’s rocky bottom. The general shape of the sea raven’s spindle-shaped body and rounded pectoral and caudal fins also aids in camouflage.

There are two dorsal fins, the first with several upright spines and a ragged appearance. Pectoral fins have one spine and three soft rays. The fins and body are often maroon or brown, but color can vary according to the individual’s habitat. Fins are often light and dark banded. During the breeding season, males may display bright colors of red, orange or yellow to attract mates.

Female sea ravens lay eggs between October and December and may lay multiple sets in a season. The eggs are deposited near the base of a sponge. Larval sea ravens are predatory, feeding on the larvae of other fish. Adult sea ravens are primarily

marine and are common in waters between six and 350 feet deep, with a preference for water at or below 55 degrees. On average, adults are between 18 and 20 inches and weight about five pounds.

Usually feeding at night, sea ravens will eat a variety of mollusks and crustaceans, small fish and most any kind of bottom-dwelling invertebrate that is available. The primary predator of sea ravens is another bottom-dweller, the ominous-looking monkfish.

Upon capture, a sea raven immediately inflates its body with water as a defense to make it appear larger. If and when it is released back into the water, the sea raven will float until it is able to discharge the water from its body.



Relationship to People

Sea ravens are not customarily eaten by people and there is no commercial harvest of this species. Individuals are sometimes used as bait in lobster pots. Relatives of the sea raven in the Pacific Ocean are known to have poisonous spines, but the Atlantic species is

harmless to people. When handled by humans, sea ravens make a humming or vibrating noise, probably as a sign of fear.

The Atlantic sea raven is very common in its range from the Chesapeake Bay north to the coast of Labrador. The population is not thought to have undergone changes in recent years.

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