



## Bluefish

*Pomatomus saltatrix*

One of the first species of fish caught by a beginning saltwater angler, and famous for its “blitzes” during the fall, the bluefish reigns supreme in both popularity and abundance along the Atlantic coast. Good to eat when freshly caught, bluefish can be found relatively close to the coast, so they are within easy reach of many anglers.

### History and Status

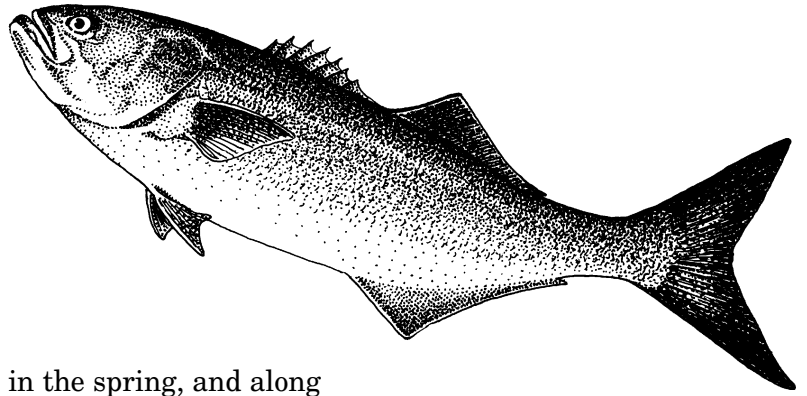
The bluefish is one of the most important recreational fish of the Atlantic coast and is an important commercial species as well. In recent years the bluefish harvest has declined, and although the species is still quite abundant, Atlantic coast bluefish stocks are considered stressed. Currently North Carolina has both a size limit and a creel limit to protect bluefish from overharvest.

### Description

The bluefish is one of several members of the family Pomatomidae. It has a stout body that is greenish blue along the back and silver on the sides and belly. Bluefish have a slightly protruding lower jaw full of razor sharp teeth, which gives larger specimens the nickname “chopper.”

### Habitat and Habits

Bluefish are a migratory, pelagic species found offshore, in surf zones, inlets and sounds. They usually form large schools during the spring, summer and fall months. Bluefish spawn in two principal areas—offshore from southern Florida to North



Carolina in the spring, and along the mid-Atlantic blight during the summer. Larvae tend to drift with ocean currents and enter the nearshore waters and estuaries all along the east coast. Juveniles are generally less than 6 inches long in July but may exceed 12 inches by fall.

Adult bluefish in the Atlantic travel northward in the spring and summer, then move south in the fall and winter. Larger fish may also move inshore in the warmer months and overwinter farther offshore. Bluefish are sight feeders and will zero in on a single baitfish rather than slash through a school of prey. As a general rule, bluefish feed during the day, but they are still caught at night when anglers use chum or bait to appeal to their sense of smell.

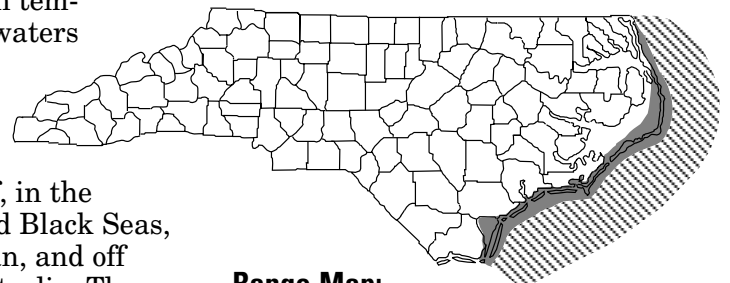
### Range and Distribution

Bluefish occur in temperate and warm waters of the western Atlantic from Nova Scotia to Uruguay, off the West African shelf, in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, in the Indian Ocean, and off Tanzania and Australia. There are two major fishery areas for bluefish off the coast of the



United States—Cape Cod Bay to Cape Lookout and Cape Canaveral to Pompano Beach.

### People Interactions

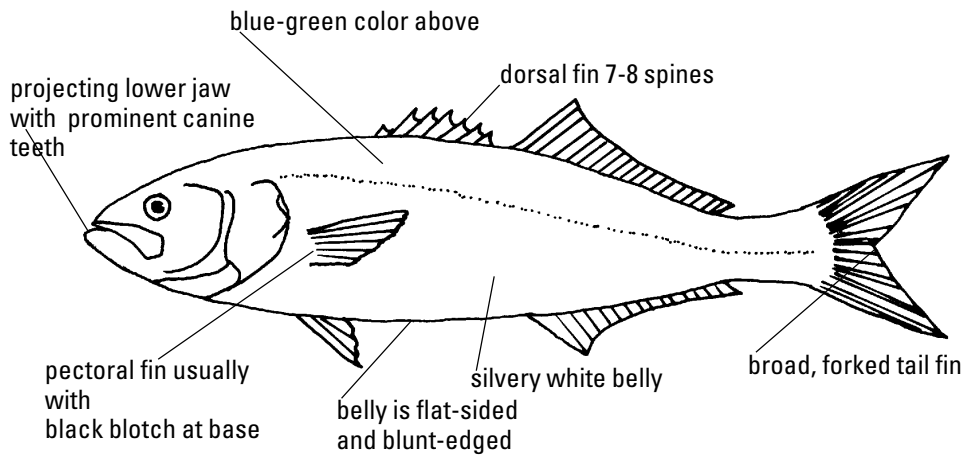
Bluefish are popular for several reasons. They are abundant; they readily take baits and artificial lures; and they are excellent table fare when freshly caught. Small “tailor” bluefish can be caught in coastal areas of North Carolina year-round, but runs of big blues are common in the early spring and late fall. Bluefish over 15 pounds are commonly caught along the beaches, inlets, sounds and shoals of Cape Hatteras, Cape Lookout and Cape Fear. From 1987 to 1991 North Carolina recreational anglers harvested an



#### Range Map:

Young Bluefish (summer, fall)   
Adult Bluefish (spring, fall) 

**WILD  
Facts**



**BLUEFISH**

**Classification**

Class: Osteichthyes  
Order: Perciformes

**Average Size**

Bluefish up to 15 lbs. are common catches. The current rod-and-reel world record is a bluefish of 31 lbs., 12 oz., taken at Hatteras Inlet in 1972.

**Food**

Smaller fishes, squid and shrimp.

**Breeding**

Spawning occurs in the spring and summer. An average-size female will lay 1 million eggs during the second year after reaching sexual maturity.

**Young**

Young bluefish move inshore and grow quickly in size in tidal bays and estuaries.

**Life Expectancy**

Specimens past age 8 are rare, but some may exceed 14 years.

estimated 1.3 to 4.2 million pounds of bluefish. North Carolina leads all other states in commercial bluefish harvest, with the state's commercial harvest averaging 31 percent of the total commercial bluefish harvest from 1978 to 1987.

**References**

Manooch, C. S. *Fisherman's Guide: Fishes of the Southeastern United States* (Raleigh: North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, 1984).

Ristori, A. *Fishing for Bluefish* (Fisherman Library, 1990).

North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries. *Description of North Carolina's Coastal Fishery Resource, 1972-1991* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources).

**Credits**

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