



# Atlantic Menhaden

Scientific name: *Brevoortia tyrannus*

The Atlantic menhaden are a small oily and protein packed fish that is found from Nova Scotia to Northern Florida. They are considered the most important fish in the sea by many, and is a protein packed snack for striped bass, bluefish, bluefin tuna, sharks, cobia, mackerel, dolphins, whales, seabirds and much more. Another name for fish that are eaten by larger predators is forage fish. Atlantic menhaden are related to many other bait or forage fish in the herring family. Have you heard of herring before? What about American or Hickory Shad?

Atlantic menhaden swim in large schools to help protect themselves from predators, and graze on phytoplankton or algae. By eating these floating plants, menhaden help transfer the energy from the sun into food for predators. This means Atlantic menhaden have a special job of turning sunlight into food for fish, and even food for us when we eat the fish. This means that energy is transferred from one trophic level to the next, and is all part of the food web in our ocean and Bay ecosystem. Have you heard of trophic levels before?

Atlantic menhaden are often used for bait by recreational anglers, and caught by commercial fishermen to be used to catch crabs, lobsters and many different fish. One company also catches millions of pounds of menhaden in the Mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay which are "reduced" into many different products, and used to feed farm raised fish. Unlike farm raised oysters, farm raised fish can impact the natural ecosystem if not managed properly.

Atlantic menhaden have many different nicknames depending where they're found, or who is talking about them. Some people call them bunker, pogies, LY, peanut bunker, mossbunker and more.

CCA Maryland has worked with many other groups for many years to protect Atlantic menhaden from overharvest, and to limit large scale harvest in the Chesapeake Bay. Scientists and fisheries managers are always working hard to try and find ways to balance the amount of menhaden left in the water for their natural ecosystem role, with the amount harvested commercially for human use. This is NOT an easy job! Find out more at [www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org)

**CAN YOU DRAW MORE MENHADEN TO MAKE THE SCHOOL BIGGER AND PROTECT THEM FROM PREDATORS? YOU COULD ALSO DRAW SOME PREDATORS IN THE BLANK SPACE LOOKING FOR A PROTEIN PACKED MEAL!**