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THE FISHES IN VINEYARD WATERS

by
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THE FISHES IN VINEYARD WATERS

by

JOSEPH B. ELVIN

This is by no means an attempt to list all the fishes that are found in Vineyard waters, or that have been found here in the past. Rather it is a loosely connected story of Vineyard fishes and fishing, past and present.

Both fish and fishes are correct for the plural of fish. But local usage seems to tend more to the latter, so that is the form that will be used here. In other words, a fish is a fish, but fish are fishes! And so, most of the common food fishes will be listed and described in these pages, and some of the trash fishes, too. Some are wonderful eating, others are not edible at all. Some are caught with rod and reel, others are best caught with a handline. Some are game fish and will strike at almost anything; others will not take a bait at all and so must be netted. Also, how, when and where they are best caught will be discussed for some of the individual species.

The Indians were the first Vineyard fishermen. Mostly they caught their fishes with hook and line. But it is well established that they also used nets and traps. And when the English first came to the Island they pretty much followed the fishing methods of the Indians.

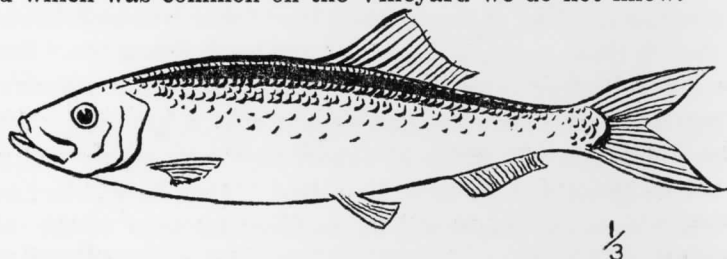
Back in the early part of the seventeenth century when the settlers arrived, there were many more fishes in Vineyard waters than there are today. There were more species, too. For some have been over-fished commercially with little or no thought of conservation, and today we are reaping the results of such practises. Where are the smelt, the sturgeon, the halibut and even the shad that once were plentiful in Vineyard waters?

For more than half a century trap fishermen caught fishes in the waters around Martha's Vineyard in enormous quantities.

Then, suddenly it seemed as though there were no more fishes to be caught. It was much the same with the draggers—the otter trawlers—and even with the handliners. Some have put the blame on changes in the climate. Others say that there have been changes in the migratory habits of the fishes themselves.

But this is not an article on conservation, and there are still a tremendous amount of fishes in the waters around our Island. The fishes described and discussed will be listed as follows: first their more common name or names; then the scientific name, and last, where it is known, the Algonquin Indian name. The fishes will be listed alphabetically.

Alewife. Herring—*Alosa pseudoharengus*. There seem to be two Indian names for the alewife, *aumsuog* and *munnowhatteaug*, and which was common on the Vineyard we do not know.

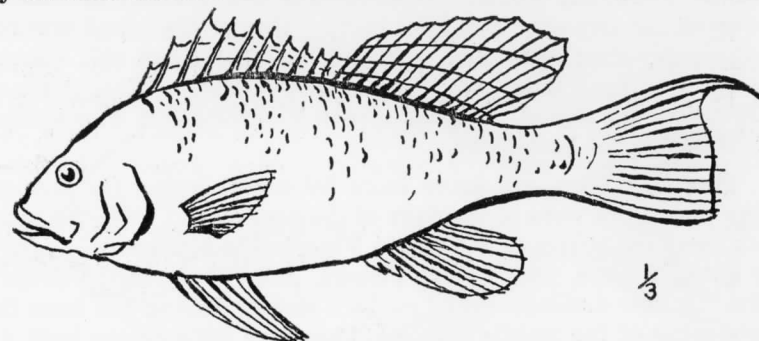


For almost two hundred years the alewife had tremendous local value and commercial importance. Alewives were smoked, salted and pickled. And in the spring of the year when they returned to local waters to spawn they were eaten fresh, and that in spite of the fact that they are full of bones. But tastes change, and the standard of living changes so that today the alewife is almost considered a trash fish. And about all that is eaten of the herring now is the roe.

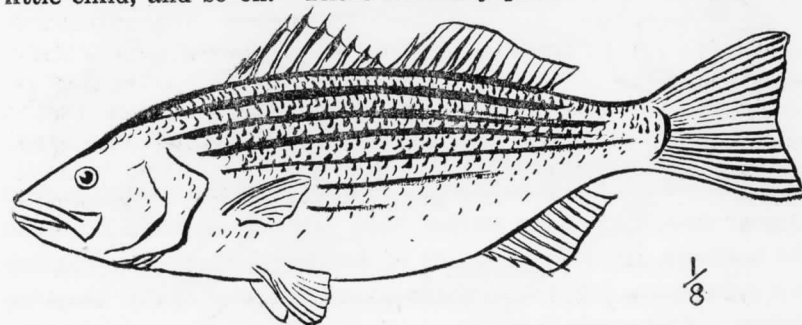
The alewife will not take a bait. When they arrive in the very early spring they are searching for fresh water in which to spawn. And so they are taken in the creeks and about the mouths of brooks mostly with dip nets.

Once the big Gloucester and Boston fishing schooners—the salt bankers—put into Vineyard waters to load up with herring for bait. That was a market that no one thought would ever end. It did end. But the urge to spawn still brings the alewife back every spring whether it is still commercially important or not.

Bass. Sea Bass. Black Sea Bass—*Centropristes striatus*. The Vineyard is just about at the extreme northern part of the range of the sea bass. They are strictly a bottom fish and are best caught on handlines or with a light rod and reel. But quite often a good sized one will be caught in a lobster pot. The sea bass is by all odds the finest chowder fish.



Bass. Striped Bass. Striper. *Morone saxatilis*. This is one of the top notch game fishes and every fall draws hordes of fishermen to the Island for the Bass Derby. There are grand prizes given for the largest fish caught during the month-long Derby by an Islander and by an off-Islander, by a woman, by an old man, by a little child, and so on. There are daily prizes and weekly prizes,

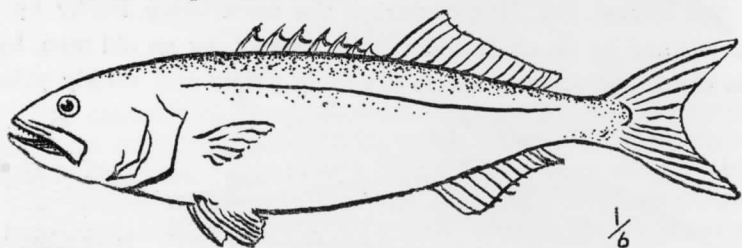


boat prizes and shore prizes. And the nightly weighing in to see who gets the prizes is an exciting time.

The range of the striped bass is from Nova Scotia to the Gulf of Mexico. It is a fine eating fish, although not the very best, in the opinion of some who consider the meat a little dry.

In the last half of the last century fishing for bass on the Vineyard as well as on the Elizabeth Islands, Block Island, and elsewhere was an important business. But then, unlike today, it was a rich man's sport. Elaborate clubhouses were built. And there were piers extending from the shore out beyond the surf so that the sportsman wouldn't even have to put on boots or waders, but could fish dry-shod from the piers. Grover Cleveland was one of those dry-shod fishermen. Some Vineyarders can still remember the New York Bass Club on Squibnocket, and the Pasque Island Club across the Sound, and there were Vineyard men who worked full time for the bass clubs.

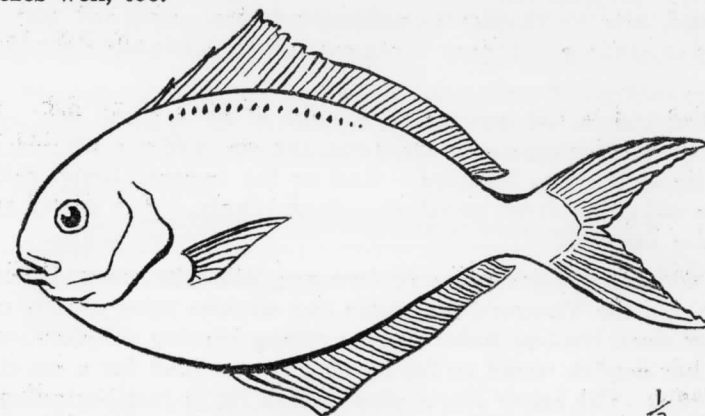
However, there are many more fishermen trying for stripers today than there were in the days of the bass clubs. And the sport is an excellent source of income to Vineyard businessmen — sporting goods dealers, liquor store owners, and filling station proprietors. A new development of modern striper fishing has been the introducing of the mobile camps. These are little camps built directly on a truck chassis, and are very popular with those who want to live as near the beach as possible, that is near the beach where the fishing is best. For stripers do move around, and so does the new breed of striper fishermen.



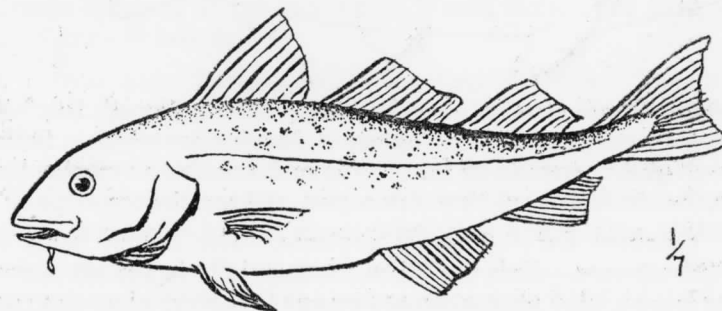
Bluefish — *Pomatomus saltatrix*. The range of the bluefish is even greater than that of the striped bass, being from Nova Scotia to the northern and eastern coasts of South America. The bluefish is a great game fish, too, perhaps an even greater fighter than the striper. And surely it is better eating. There are many who consider the bluefish second to none as a table fish.

The blue is taken from the beaches, surf-casting, but it loves the tide rips about the Island, so many more blues are caught from boats than from the beaches. Prizes are also given for blues in the current fishing derbies.

Bluefish run from little "snapper blues" which weigh only a few ounces, and are delicious pan fried, to the big vicious fighting blues — the choppers — that sometimes weigh twelve pounds and more. And be careful of your fingers when you try to get one of them off the hook. The bluefish not only keeps very well, but freezes well, too.



Butterfish — *Poronotus triacanthus*. This little pan fish — it only rarely reaches a pound in weight — is delicious eating. The range is from Maine to Florida, and it is almost exclusively caught by commercial fishermen. In the days of trap fishing on the Vineyard butterfish was one of the big money makers.



Cod. Codfish. *Gadus morhua*. Two Indian names for the codfish have survived; *anishamog* which means "it smells bad," and *pauganautamwock* which was its more proper name.

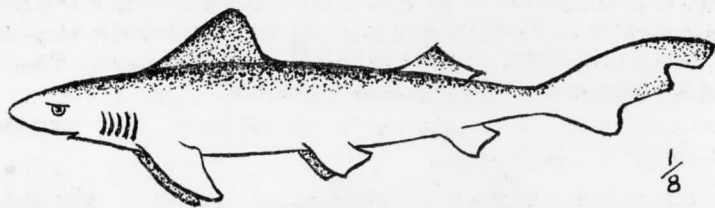
The codfish lives in all the colder waters of the North Atlantic Ocean. Codfishes grow rather slowly but sometimes reach a quite

enormous size. According to the United States Department of the Interior the largest one on record measured over six feet long and weighed 211 pounds. That is quite a fish.

It was codfish, salted and exported to Europe, the West Indies and the West Coast of Africa that first brought real money to New England, and so to Martha's Vineyard, too. Salt cod was the money crop to a great many Vineyarders who nominally were farmers.

The cod is not ordinarily thought of as a game fish. But hooking and landing a good sized one, say ten or fifteen pounds, can be quite an exciting business. And no fish is much better eating than a cod either fresh or salted. Surprisingly, it is a pretty good chowder fish, too.

Codfishes are voracious feeders and will take many different baits. On the Vineyard sea clams and winkles were usually considered about the best baits. In the spring herring was frequently used, but dogfish would go for herring sooner than for a sea clam or winkle. The heavy Norwegian codfish jig is just beginning to be used on the Vineyard, some say with even better results than with a baited hook.



Dogfish. There are two dogfish in local waters, Smooth Dogfish — *Mustelus canis*, and Spiny Dogfish — *Squalus acanthias*. Both of these dogfishes seem to be interesting and valuable to marine biologists, but to fishermen they are a pest and a nuisance.

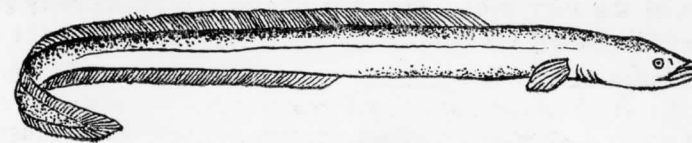
Eel. Common Eel — *Anguilla rostrata*. The Indian name was *nquitteconnauog*. Eels are taken commercially in the great ponds of the Island, but a generation or two ago they were of much greater commercial importance than they are today. They are caught in small-mesh wire pots baited, preferably, with shiners or small menhaden.

They are caught from late summer until the first real freeze. Then they go into the mud, and after that they must be taken with spears, and spearing for eels through a hole chopped in the ice

used to produce a lot of eels not too many years ago.

There was always a good market for eels at Christmas time in the cities of the eastern seaboard. For Italian people consider them a great delicacy. Vineyard people used to consider them a great delicacy, too. An eel stifle which is an eel casserole dish with salt pork, potatoes and broken hardtack biscuit used to be a Vineyard staple.

The eels are held for the Christmas market in big wooden cars or floating crates. In the olden days eel buyers came from New York, and Boston and Philadelphia and there was real competition for the Island catch.



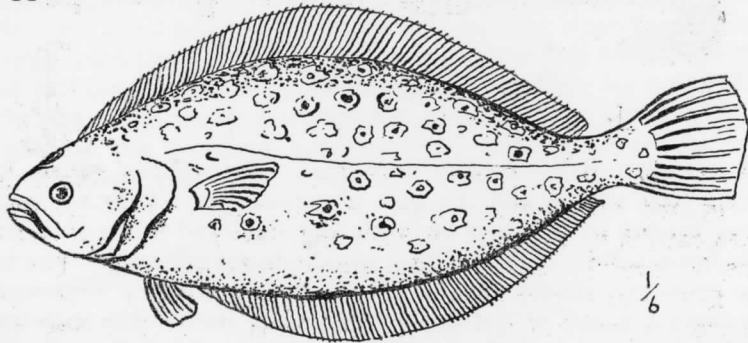
Eel. *Conger Eel* — *Conger oceanicus*. The conger eel is big, strong, and vicious and can give a serious bite. They are sometimes caught by accident on hook and line, and when that happens, be careful. They are also caught in lobster pots. The lobster fishermen always used to save them because they were worth ten cents a pound at the cap log in Woods Hole. But they were mean things to handle.

Eel. Silver Eel. Eeshaw Eel — *Muraena argentia*. The Indian name was *Neeshaug* from which comes the local name "eeshaw." Marine biologists state that there is no such thing as an eeshaw or silver eel, that they are only fully mature common eels heading for their breeding grounds south of Bermuda. And one supposes that the marine biologists know what they are talking about.

But the Indians thought that they were a separate species and so did the Vineyarders. Eeshaw eels would not take a bait, which is a very un-eel-like trait. They were caught in big wicker "beach pots" that were always set on the beach side of the great ponds. The silver eels were led into the pots by means of little portable weirs that were driven into the sandy bottom in front of the pots. And here are three more facts about the eeshaw eels. They were much bigger than common eels, and they were not at all slimy. But

also, they most certainly were trying to reach salt water. So undoubtedly the marine biologists are right.

Flounder. Blackback. Pug. Winter Flounder — *Pseudopleuronectes americanus*. This fine fish is perhaps the best eating of all the flounders. That is just another way of saying that perhaps it makes the best fillet of sole. Blackbacks can be caught with hook and line in Vineyard waters from March through November. Blackbacks have very small mouths, and so, of course, a very small hook must be used to catch them. They are not game fish. Still a good-sized blackback will provide quite a lot of action at the end of a line. Almost any bait is good, but scallop rims are generally considered the very best. This fish is also frequently caught in scallop dredges, but the bulk of the catch is brought in by the big draggers.



Flounder. Fluke. Summer Flounder — *Paralichthys dentatus*. Unlike the blackback, this flounder is migratory, and is caught in Vineyard waters only in the summer. It is very unlike the blackback in other respects, too. It has a big mouth and so a good-sized hook must be used to catch it, and that mouth is well provided with sharp teeth. See the *dentatus* in the scientific name? So watch out for your fingers when you take him off the hook.

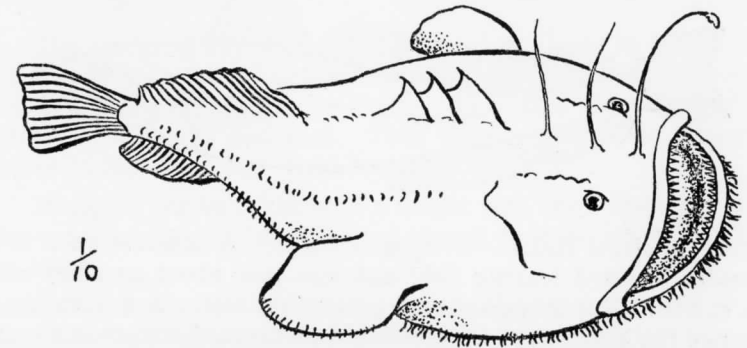
Also, the fluke is a real game fish. It will often strike an artificial lure as hard as a bluefish or striper, and after being hooked it puts up a real fight. The flesh is a little bit dry compared with the blackback but it is good eating just the same.

In the days of trap fishing fluke was one of the standbys. They were also caught by the draggers. And it is probably the small draggers that have so greatly contributed to the decline of the fluke population, for the small draggers could go into the shoal

water, and into the bays and coves where the flukes were spawning. And there they would make some tremendous catches right at spawning time.

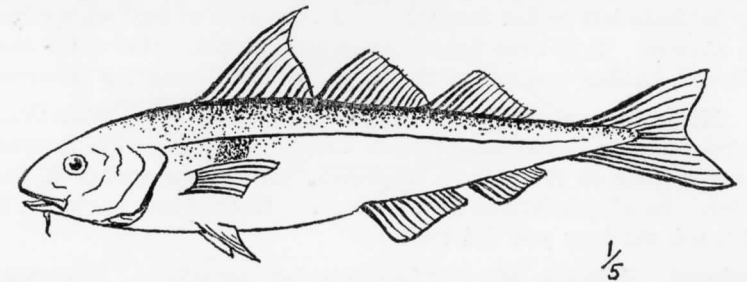
A generation or two ago the flukes were so plentiful in Vineyard waters that they were even speared for lobster bait, and many of those fishes ran to fifteen pounds and more. Today a fluke that size is seldom caught even by the big draggers.

Flounder. Yellowtail — *Limanda ferruginea*. The yellowtail is found in relatively deep water and so is caught almost entirely by the big draggers. They are very good eating. Some say even better than blackbacks.



Goosefish — *Lophius americanus*. Today the goosefish is a trash fish pure and simple. But not too many years ago goosefish tails were shipped to New York and sometimes brought a good price at Fulton Market. Perhaps it might be best not to ask who ate them.

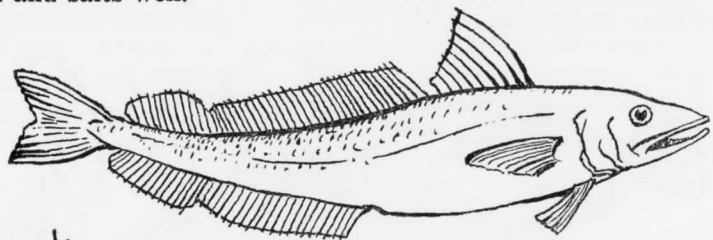
The goosefish is a horrible looking creature with a mouth almost as big as he is. Indeed, he can swallow another fish almost his own size. They are sometimes caught on hook and line, but when they are you can be sure it is an accident.



Haddock — *Melanogrammus aeglefinus*. The Indian name was

Pakonnottamang. The haddock is a deep water fish, but the Indians must have fished for them and caught them, too, or there would be no Indian name for them.

Today more haddock is caught and marketed by the big trawlers even than cod. Indeed, the haddock is one of the mainstays of the United States North Atlantic fishery. In the past most haddock was caught on line trawls and with hand lines. But today more than ninety percent of the catch is made by the big trawlers. Finnan haddie is lightly smoked haddock. Haddock also keeps well and salts well.



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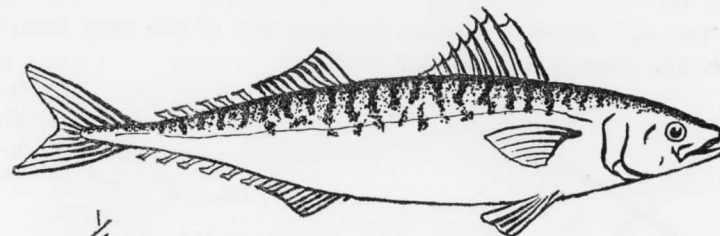
Hake. Squirrel Hake — *Urophycis chuss*. A squirrel hake is an exceedingly hard looking fish, and also just about as slimy as a fish can be. But it is good eating just the same. A generation or two ago the hake was very plentiful in Vineyard waters in the fall of the year and hake fishing was not only a lot of fun, but also a means of getting a supply of salt fish for the winter at very little cost. But nobody fishes for hake any more because there haven't been any to catch for quite a long time. Perhaps they will come back. The bluefish have gone several times and have always come back.

Halibut. Atlantic Halibut — *Hippoglossus hippoglossus*. Nobody fishes for halibut today any more than for hake, because there aren't any halibuts left to fish for either. In the case of halibut we know the answer. It is over-fishing pure and simple. But once, along with cod, halibut was one of the staples of the Gloucester fishermen.

Halibuts were caught by Vineyard fishermen, too. From Squibnocket landing and from Noman's Land. Halibuts were supposed to congregate on the bottom wherever there was a spring of fresh water. So all you had to do was find the fresh water spring. But don't ask me how you did that.

Mackerel. Atlantic Mackerel — *Scomber scombrus*. The mackerel was one of the great staples of the trap fishermen. They were

also caught by seiners and gill netters. There were mackerel seiners and gill netters fishing out of Vineyard ports in just about everything from Noman's Land boats and catboats to schooners.



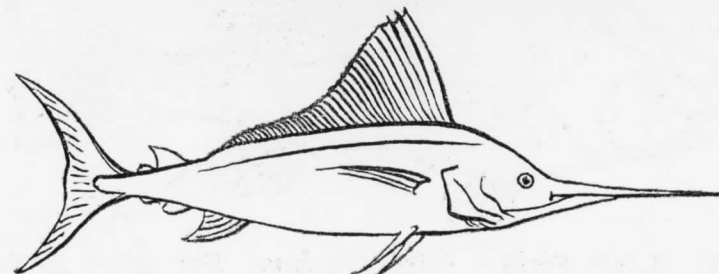
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The mackerel run began off the Virginia Capes in late March, and many Vineyard fishermen would head south to Chincoteague and wait there for the run to begin. Then they would follow the great schools north and east. They usually arrived in Vineyard waters in late May and early June.

Mackerel can be taken with a bright jig. And there are some who consider jigging for mackerel almost as good sport as fishing for blues.

Mackerel. Bull's-Eye Mackerel. Chub Mackerel — *Scomber colias*. The bull's-eye mackerel doesn't grow quite as large as the Atlantic mackerel, nor does it keep or salt as well. But when really fresh it is just about as good eating. It probably gets its name from a translucent spot on the forehead.

Marlin. White Marlin. Skilligillee — *Makaira albida*. Dr. Ronald Novales of Northwestern University who so kindly checked the

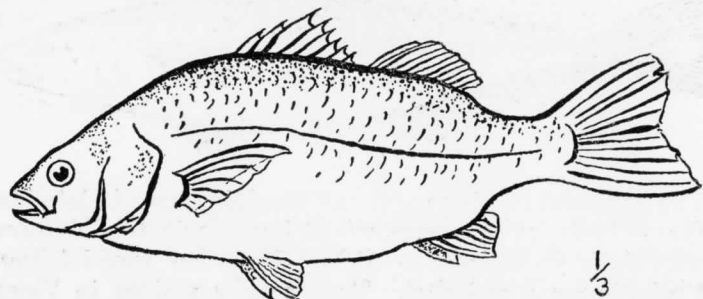


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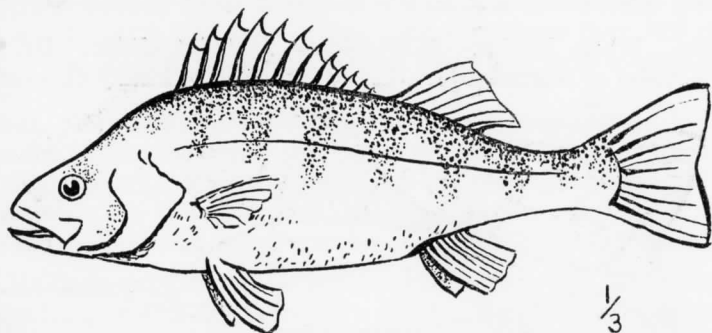
scientific names of the fishes in this list while he was doing research at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, says that no

one there seemed ever to have heard the name "skilligillee." Is there any one on the Vineyard, at least any fisherman, who hasn't heard it?

The skilligillee is a game fish and one of the very best, but unlike the swordfish it is poor eating.

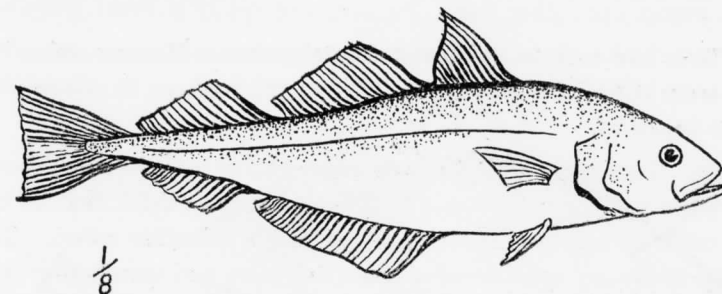


Perch. White Perch — *Roccus americana*. The white perch should probably be rated as a game fish although a very small one, and with a light rod will provide quite a lot of excitement. They are caught in all the great ponds of the Island, even, sometimes in those that are completely salt. For though the white perch prefers brackish waters, he can live in both salt and fresh water, too. Formerly these fishes were seined and shipped to Fulton Market in large quantities. It was the Jewish people, not the Italians, who wanted white perch.



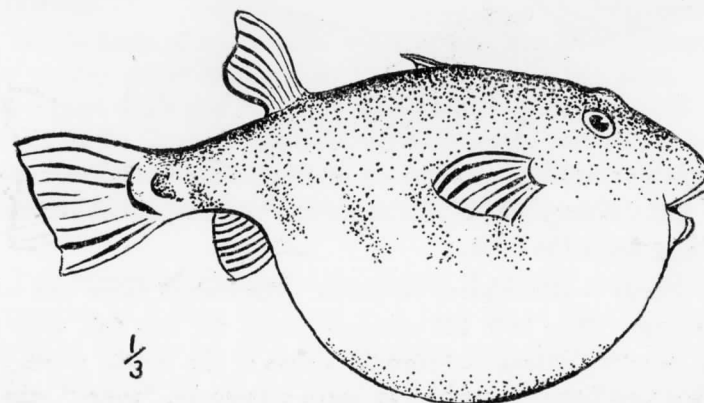
Perch. Yellow Perch — *Perca flavescens*. The yellow perch is purely a fresh water species, and so will only be found in the Island's entirely fresh water ponds. And not in all of them. But where they are found they are fun to catch. And those who like fresh water fish say they are good eating, too.

The largest yellow perch on the Island are probably found in Witch Pond in Gay Head.



Pollock. Boston Blue — *Pollachius virens*. Not very much seems to be known about the habits of the pollock except that it is migratory and travels in immense schools. Once in a while those schools hit Vineyard waters in the fall. And when they do there is great sport. The Devil's Bridge is one of their favorite feeding places. But sometimes they will enter Menemsha Creek and other Island creeks.

They strike a lure or plug almost like a blue or striper. And they are good eating. Indeed, some Vineyarders prefer them to cod or haddock. They make an excellent salt fish though the flesh is a little darker than cod. Most pollock are caught commercially in otter trawls.



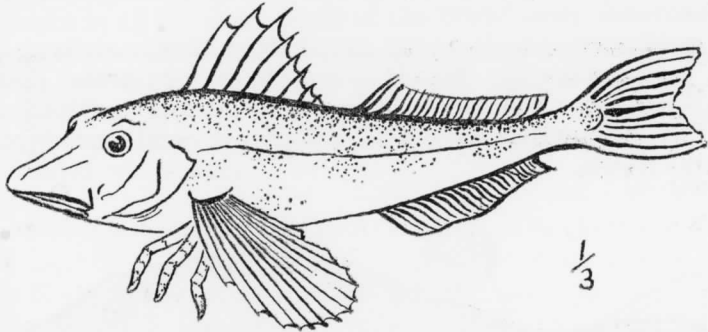
Puffer. Northern Puffer. Blowfish — *Spheroides maculatus*. These strange little fishes, when they are hauled up into a boat or onto a pier, can inflate themselves almost as full of air as a foot-

ball. And while they are in the process of doing it they emit a loud series of grunts. They can also strip the bait from a hook faster than almost any other fish. So they are really a great nuisance.

They are said to be extremely poisonous. However blowfish tails were sometimes eaten on the Vineyard with no ill effects that I ever heard of.

Sculpin. Longhorn Sculpin — *Myoxocephalus octodecemspinosus*. And when you try to take one off a hook you may think that he has even more spines than those eighteen in his scientific name. The sculpin is usually considered a trash fish pure and simple and only good for cat food. But actually, sculpin tails are not bad eating, and they are not poisonous either.

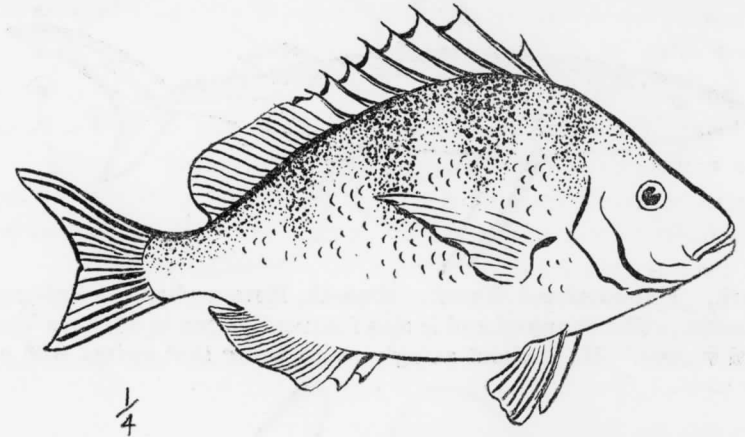
Sea Robin. Northern Sea Robin — *Prionotus carolinus*. This strange creature with beautiful blue eyes, a long snout, and six almost-legs like an insect, and a loud, loud grunt, is another trash



fish. But as with the sculpin, sea robin tails are really not bad eating. But the sea robin is a nuisance and will keep other and better fish away from the hook.

Scup. Porgy — *Stenotomus chrysops*. The Indian name was *mish-cuppanoung*. Thus both the common names for this fish, scup and porgy, are corruptions and simplifications of the Indian word. On the Vineyard however, porgy, or more commonly, "pogee" was the local name for menhaden.

The scup arrive in Vineyard waters early in the spring. The flowering shrub, *Amelanchier canadensis*, that is called the shad bush most everywhere else was usually called the scup bush on the Island. It begins to bloom just about the time the scup arrive. When the scup came, they came in huge schools. And scup was

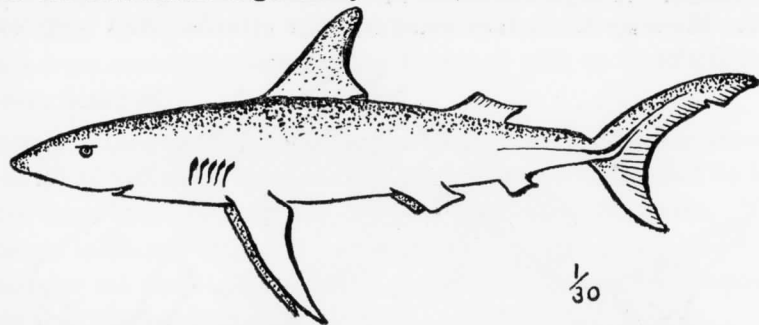


probably the single greatest source of income to the trap fishermen. It was not too uncommon to take a hundred barrels of scup in a single haul of the trap gear in the spring of the year. Scup were also the backbone of the catch of the handliners, both sport and commercial.

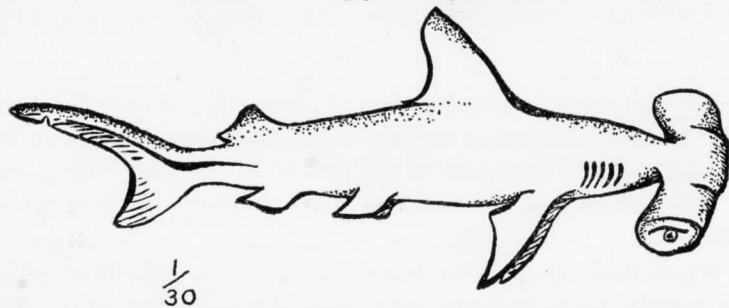
Whole fleets of small boats would come from New Bedford and other nearby ports to handline Vineyard waters for scup. They made a good day's pay out of it, too. Sometimes they would all be on the Middle Ground. Sometimes they would anchor off one of the points of the North Shore, in a long line reaching out into deep water, and fish through a whole tide. But that was when scup were worth money.

Two things led, mainly, to the decline in price of scup. One was the practise of fishing for them with high speed otter trawls, and depressing the market with the resulting huge catches. The other reason, and probably the greater one, is the ever-growing disinclination of the American housewife to cook any round fish, or pan fish, or fish with bones, if she can help it. She doesn't know what she is missing, and making her family miss, too.

Shark. Blue Shark — *Prionace glauca*. This beautiful shark is frequently seen by Vineyard fishermen offshore. But it is when he comes inshore that there is consternation at the bathing beaches. For the blue shark is generally considered to be a man-eater.



Shark. Hammerhead Shark. Smooth Hammerhead — *Sphyrna zygaena*. The hammerhead is also frequently seen in offshore Vineyard waters. He is about as ugly as anything that swims, and not



beautiful or graceful at all like the blue shark. He very rarely comes inshore. And that is fortunate, for he, too, is considered to be a man-eater.

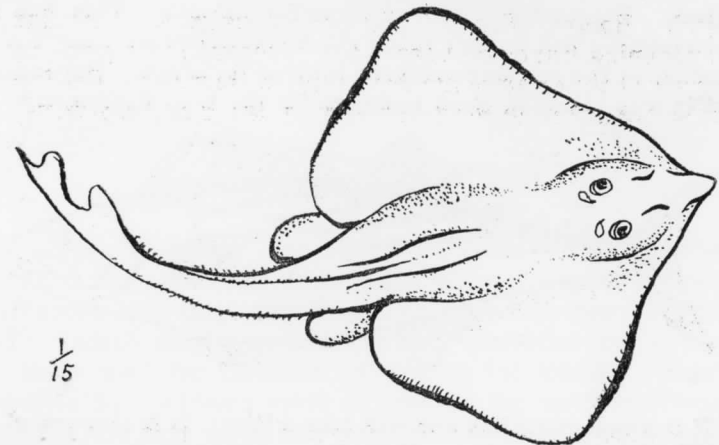
Shark. Sand Shark — *Carcharias taurus*. This sandpaper-skinned shark is frequently found very close inshore. But so far as is known he is entirely harmless. Many surf fishermen have hooked a sand shark and thought they had a striped until they got him to the beach.

Shockfish. Torpedo — *Torpedo nobiliana*. The shockfish is usually considered as belonging in tropical and semi-tropical waters. But he is a quite frequent visitor to the Vineyard. Particularly in the fall of the year they will come into the salt ponds to die. Then the herring gulls have a feast.

The shockfish is big, thick and heavy, and those that come into the Vineyard ponds are often three feet long or longer. This fish gets its local name because of the electric organ that it carries in



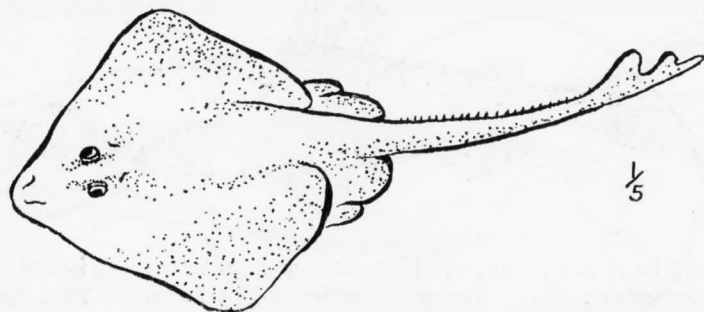
its head, and with which it can give a very severe shock. If you ever see one swishing its tail and seeming to be trying to push himself up into the beach grass, don't touch it.



Skate. Barndoor Skate — *Raja laevis*. This big skate, up to six feet in length is usually found offshore in deep water, but very occasionally one will be hooked by a surf fisherman. The barndoor skate can be told from the common skate by its pointed snout as well as by its size.

Skate. Common Skate. Little Skate — *Raja erinacea*. This is the skate that is so often caught by mistake on sandy bottom. It is usually considered a trash fish but actually the wings are very good eating. So good eating, in fact, that fake bay scallops have been

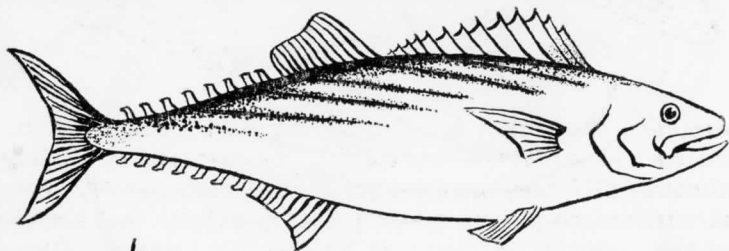
manufactured from its wings by means of a tool that looked something like an apple corer. And it is said that only an expert could tell the difference between skate-wing scallops and the real thing.



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Skate — the whole skate — not just the wings — used to be considered just about the best lobster bait. After being lightly pickled in brine it would last on the spindle or in a bait bag longer than almost any other bait except swordfish heads.

Skipjack. Bonito. Bonita — *Euthynnus pelamis*. This fine big free-swimming fish doesn't reach the Vineyard every year, for we are nearly at the extreme northern limit of its range. But in some years it was taken in good numbers by the trap fishermen.

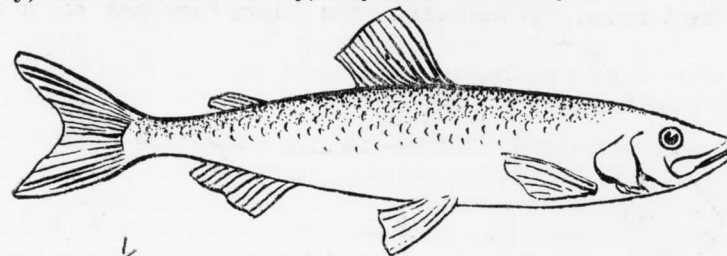


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It is a real game fish and will take a lure. It is also one of the very finest table fishes, usually being cut into steaks about three quarters of an inch thick and fried. It is very seldom found in markets today, and that is too bad. Indeed, it never was found in the fish markets inland as the demand along the coast was always enough to absorb the whole run.

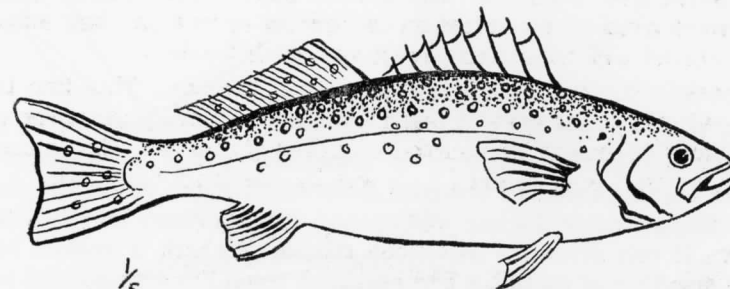
Smelt. American Smelt — *Osmerus mordax*. In the past the smelt was quite important commercially on the Vineyard, and there are tales of almost actual warfare between Chilmarkers and West Tisburyites over smelt fishing in the Tiasquam River. Smelts en-

tered the other brooks on the Island, too, in the spring. Then suddenly, and no one knows why, they didn't come any more. The rea-



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son may have been a change in water temperature, or it could have been something else. The smelt is a relative of the salmon, but a very small relative, for the average length is between six and nine inches.

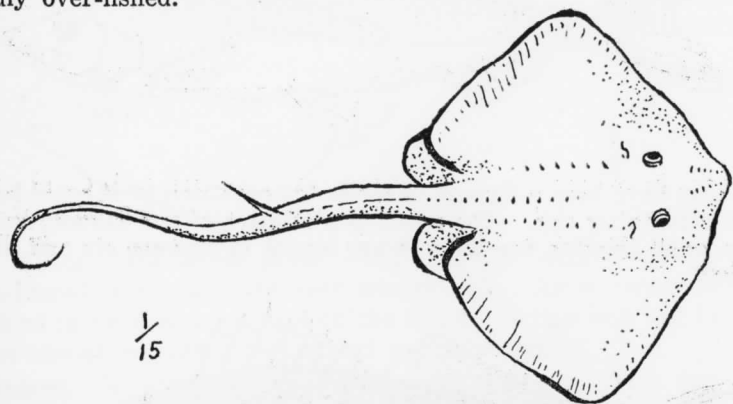


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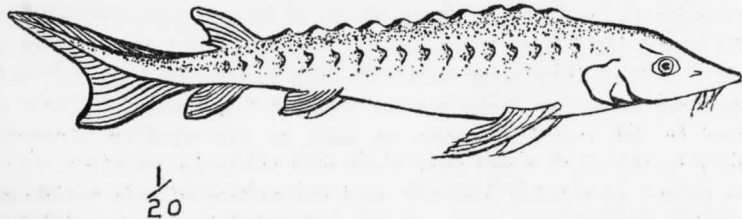
Squeteague. Weakfish. Sea Trout — *Cynoscion regalis*. The Indian name was *squiteauog*, from which, of course, comes squeteague. Until about 1910 they were caught in enormous quantities in the traps. Indeed, they were taken in such quantities that they were sometimes used for fertilizer as well as for market. They appeared in fish peddler's carts at least as far west as Worcester County in the days when they were still taken in quantity. They were prized as a table delicacy, and the author of this article can remember standing at the tail gate of the fishcart and watching them being dressed.

Not only is the squeteague a table delicacy, but it is a game fish, too, although not in quite the same class with the blues and stripers. It gets one of its names — weakfish — from the fact the structure of its mouth is relatively weak, and if it is not handled skillfully the hook will rip out. So if you think your strike may be a squeteague don't set the hook too hard.

The Vineyard is near the northern limit of the squeteague's range which could account for the fact that few have been caught in recent years, and perhaps in the future they may reach our waters in great numbers once more as they did in the past. On the other hand there seems little doubt but that they have been badly over-fished.



Sting Ray. Rough-tail Sting Ray — *Dasyatis centroura*. This extremely dangerous creature is sometimes called the stingaree. When one appeared in the trap fisherman's catch or on the deck of a dragger after the bag was opened, it was always handled with care. It can drive its poisonous stinger through a rubber boot with one fling of its tail. The resulting wound is very painful and sometimes may even require hospitalization.



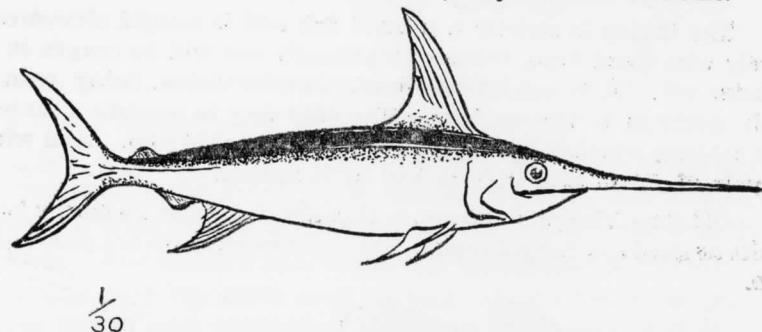
Sturgeon. Atlantic Sturgeon — *Acipenser oxyrinchus*. As long as traps were set about the Vineyard an occasional sturgeon would wander into them, as would a shad or a salmon or a Spanish mackerel. Only a few generations ago sturgeons spawned in Island waters in great numbers. They came right up to the beaches to deposit their eggs. True caviar is made from those eggs.

The Indian name was *kauposhaug*, and the Indian method of

catching them — or one method — was to dig a trench in the beach at low water. Then as the tide rose the sturgeons would come up onto the beaches to spawn. And hopefully they would be caught in the trenches as the tide fell.

It is very rarely, today, that a sturgeon is caught in our waters.

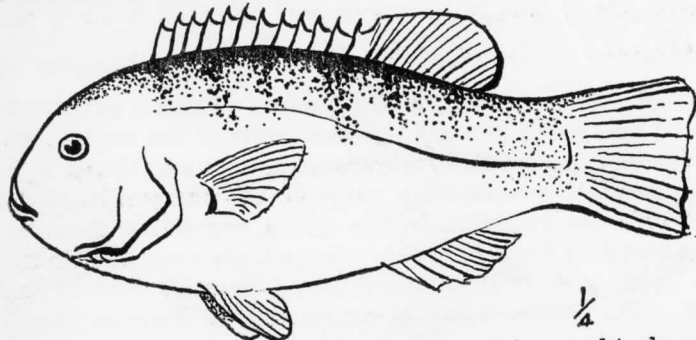
Swordfish. Broadbill — *Xiphias gladius*. There is only one broadbill, and it is found in many different parts of the world. The offshore waters around the Vineyard were once considered to be one of the finest of swordfishing grounds, and many Vineyard boats used to rig for swordfish in the spring and follow them as they moved eastward from Montauk. Some boats even went to the Virginia Capes to meet them and followed them all the way to Nova Scotia. The smaller boats, of course, stayed closer to home.



But swordfishing around the Vineyard may never again be what it was. For some years ago commercial swordfishermen began to hire light planes to spot the fishes for them. This increased the catches tremendously in some cases. Even more recently many boats have adopted the long-line method of fishing for swords. The long-line actually is a line trawl, but much longer than the old line trawls that were used for cod and halibut and haddock, and, of course, with much larger hooks. With the long-line swords can be caught all through the year, and not just in the summer as in the past. What this may do eventually to the swordfish population is anybody's guess.

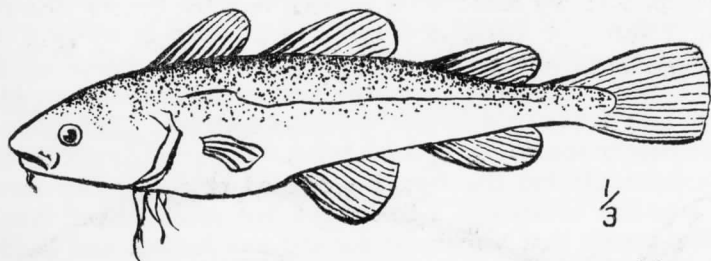
Sport fishermen still come to the Vineyard to go after swords, usually tying up in Menemsha Basin when not out on the grounds. Also, many of the small draggers as well as lobstermen still rig a stand and pulpit and go after swords with harpoon and lily iron as they always have.

Tautog. Blackfish. *Tautoga onitis*. The Indian name was *tau-tauog*. So the common name as well as the scientific name both come from the Indian word.



The tautog is strictly a ground fish and is caught almost entirely with hand lines, though occasionally one will be caught in a lobster pot. It is one of the finest chowder fishes, being second only, perhaps, to the sea bass. The only way to prepare a tautog for cooking whether in a chowder or not, is to skin him. And with a pair of pliers that isn't as bad as it sounds.

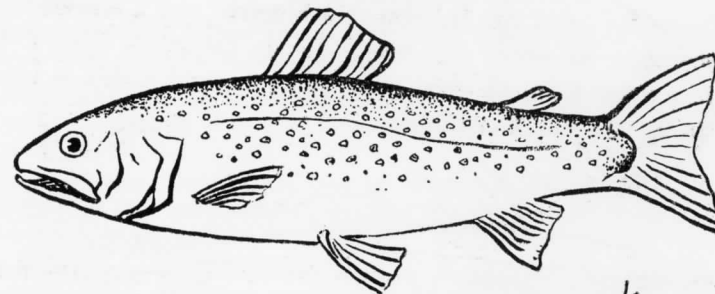
Old time Vineyard fishermen thought there was no tautog bait quite as good as a hermit crab. But other small crabs are good bait, too.



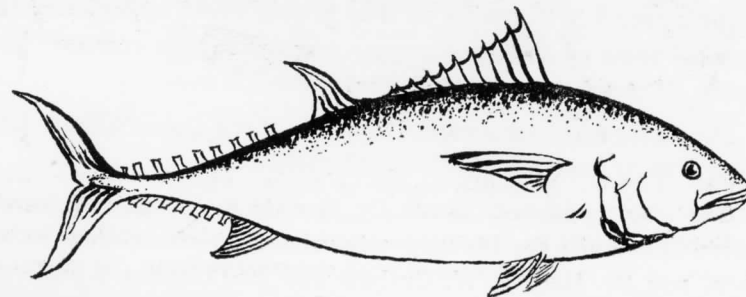
Tomcod. Tommycod — *Microgadus tomcod*. The tomcod is a small cousin of the cod and so, naturally, good eating. And only rarely will they reach fifteen inches in length. They like shallow water, and used to be caught in considerable numbers near the openings of the great ponds.

Toadfish. Oyster Toadfish — *Opsanus tau*. This extremely ugly fish with the loud grunt, is usually found near rocks in the great ponds, and harbors, just below the low water mark, where it will dig a hole for itself by fanning the sand near a rock with its tail.

The female lays her eggs in the hole and then it is the male fish's duty to guard the eggs. He takes his duty seriously, too, and will bite viciously if disturbed. Sometimes the nest is not a hole in the sand but a tin can or an old rubber boot.



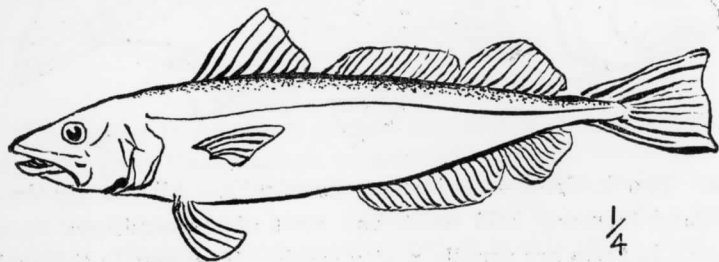
Trout. Brook Trout — *Salvelinus fontinalis*. All the brooks on the Island formerly held trout, and most of them still do, though the trout in them are usually pretty small. However, in the spring of the year in the great ponds, particularly near the mouths of brooks a trout will sometimes be caught that weighs over four pounds. And that is a good trout. In the summer when the ponds warm up, such big fishes must go back into the brooks where the water is still cold, although it is possible that some of them may go to sea when the ponds are opened.



Tuna. Bluefin. Bluefin Tuna. Horse Mackerel — *Thunnus thynnus*. Of all those names horse mackerel was the only one that these big fishes had in Vineyard waters.

Occasionally they were caught in the traps and a big one could do a lot of damage there to the net. They did run big, too, a few caught have weighed as much as fifteen hundred pounds. But a five hundred pound fish was considered big.

Today the usual run is between a hundred and a hundred and fifty pounds. As every salt water sports fisherman knows, the tuna is a game fish. A good sized tuna on light tackle is something to remember for a lifetime.



Whiting. Silver Hake. Frost Fish — *Merluccius bilinearis*. These fishes used to be taken in Vineyard traps in good numbers. They do not keep very well, but they are good eating and they freeze well.

Editor's Note:

This article by the late Joseph B. Elvin of West Tisbury is actually a sequel to his paper on trap fishing which appeared in the May 1964 issue of the *Intelligencer* and which was entitled "The Passing Of An Era On the Vineyard."

Mr. Elvin was long a valued member of the Dukes County Historical Society and his loss is deeply felt.

The editor wishes to thank Dr. Ronald R. Novales of Northwestern University for his help with scientific nomenclature in the article, and Dr. Herbert W. Graham and Mr. Charles Wheeler of the Biological Laboratory of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in Woods Hole for their aid in checking accuracy of statement in regard to the various species.

The following are some of the books and pamphlets currently on sale at the Museum building of the Society.

Whaling Wives by Emma Mayhew Whiting and Henry Beetle Hough. 294p. cloth \$4.50.

Martha's Vineyard A Short History And Guide, Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, editor, 160p., cloth \$4.00, paper \$2.00.

Bartholomew Gosnold Discoverer And Planter New England — 1602 Virginia — 1607 by Warner F. Gookin and completed by Philip L. Barbour, 271p., \$8.50.

Capawack Alias Martha's Vineyard by Warner F. Gookin, 58p., cloth \$1.00. This little book deals with some of the early voyages of discovery, and with the naming of the Island.

The Wampanoag Indian Tribute Tribes Of Martha's Vineyard by Milton A. Travers, 78p. Illustrated, paper bound. \$2.00.

Poems by Harriet Frances Bailey (an Island girl), 57p., paper \$.50, cloth \$1.00.

Our Enchanted Island by Marshal Shepard, 16p. \$.50. This pamphlet is an attempt to show that Martha's Vineyard is the island of Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

The Heath Hen's Journey To Extinction, compiled by Henry B. Hough, 31p., and two illustrations. \$.50.

Also the following back issues of the *Intelligencer* are available.

Vol. 2, No. 1 — Dr. Sidney N. Riggs' illustrated article on "Vineyard Meeting Houses."

Vol. 2, No. 2 — "The Episcopal Churches of Martha's Vineyard," by Dr. Riggs; the "Annual Report and Account of Accessions" by Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, and second installment of Rebecca Smith's *Journal*.

Vol. 2, No. 3 — "Years of Innocence on Martha's Vineyard," by Henry Beetle Hough. "Some Gay Head People About Sixty Years Ago," by Eva Ryan. "A Cache of Indian Artifacts," donated by George Magnuson.

Vol. 2, No. 4 — *The Singing Tiltons and Some of Their Songs* by E. G. Huntington, also a continuation of Rebecca Smith's *Diurnal Records For The Year 1813*.

Vol. 3, No. 1 — *Merrily They Rolled Along — On Skates — Five Miles At Sea*, by C. Nelson Bishop; *Sand Dunes and Sea Law* by Stanley King.

Vol. 3, No. 2 — *The Peddle Cart* by Flavel Gifford; *Rounding Cape Horn* by Elon O. Huntington; *Annual Report* by Eleanor Ransom Mayhew.

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