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Atlantic mackerel migratory habits

The Atlantic mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) is often called Northern or Boston mackerel to distinguish it from its close relative to the south, the Spanish mackerel. Both are members of the family Scombridae which also includes the tunas, bonitos, chub mackerel, and king mackerel.

All members of the family are alike in having two fins on their backs—a spiny one and a soft one followed by several small finlets. Finlets are also present

in the most northerly regions and by December they have vanished from all coastal waters. During summer the smaller, younger fish usually come closer to shore than the adults.

HEAD SOUTH

When mackerel disappear in the fall they go southward and offshore to the zone of warm water which flanks the outer edge of the Continental Shelf.

During winter they occupy a relatively narrow strip of water parallel to shore, but some 20 to 100 miles offshore. This strip extends from Cape Hatteras northward to the southern edge of Georges Bank and possibly as far north as Sable Island. While there, they are believed to occupy mid depths because they

are seldom seen or caught. The pronounced schooling habit of the mackerel depends on vision, and hence schools may disband and reform according to diurnal variations in light. Luminescence probably is important in keeping schools together at night. Schooling tends to be according to sizes, perhaps owing to a connection between size and swimming ability.

There are at least two subdivisions in the western Atlantic mackerel population—a southern and a northern group.

The southern group migrates from its offshore winter habitat toward the Virginia, Maryland, and New Jersey coasts in April, and thence northeastward to occupy the western part of the Gulf of Maine in summer.

The northern group migrates toward the southern New England coast in May and thence northeastward to occupy the Gulf of St. Lawrence in summer. During these spring migrations both groups are joined by vague schools which apparently move in from directly offshore. For a short while in May, all groups

are together in the area off southern New England, otherwise, their courses are fairly independent. In the fall migration, both groups approximately retrace their spring courses in returning to their winter habitat.

FISHERY

Formerly, most of the mackerel were caught with hook and line from boats that threw ground-up bait into the water to lure the schools. But starting about 1870, this way of fishing was gradually given up when the use of the purse seine became general. Now practically the entire catch is made with purse seines. Pound nets, weirs and floating traps come second, and gill nets are a poor third.

Atlantic mackerel are fished commercially in Canadian waters from the Bay of Fundy to Labrador. However, best catches are landed in southwestern Nova Scotia and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence around Magdalen Islands, Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton Island.



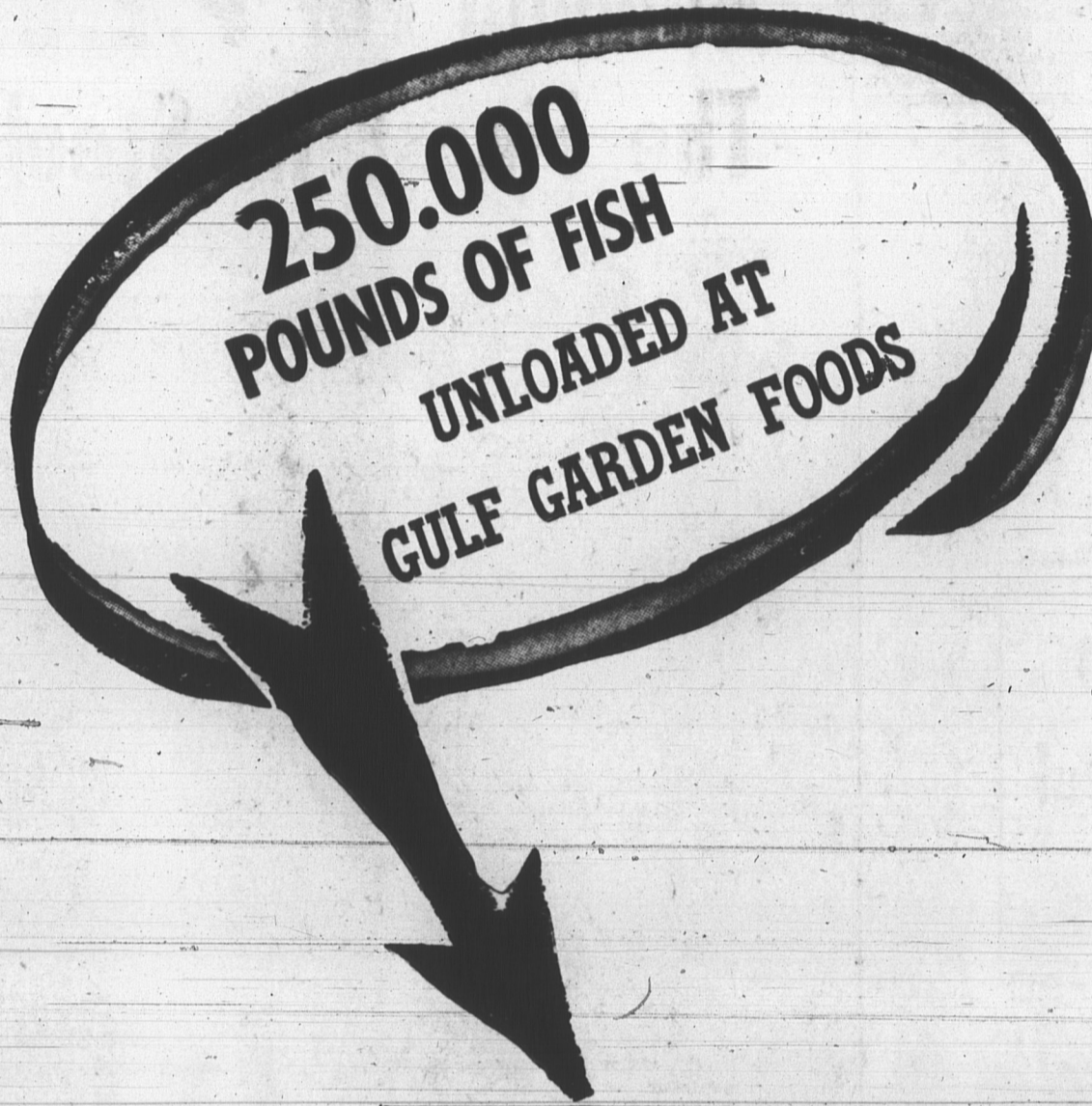
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Gulf Garden Foods Ltd. trawler fleet of four ships, the Gulf Guard, Gulf Gallant, Gulf Gull and Howe Bay, seen here sailed into Georgetown Harbor Tuesday, April 5th, 1966 from the fishing grounds off St. Paul's Island. They had been fishing on Brown's Bank out of the port of Shelburne, N.S., since mid January and now have returned to fish gulf waters out of their home port of Georgetown. Unloading operations of the 250,000 pounds of fish brought here by the trawlers began immediately.

The three trawlers, the Gulf Guard, Gulf Gull and Gulf Gallant returned to the fishing grounds April 7th, 1966.

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