

BAYLANDS

Nature Notes

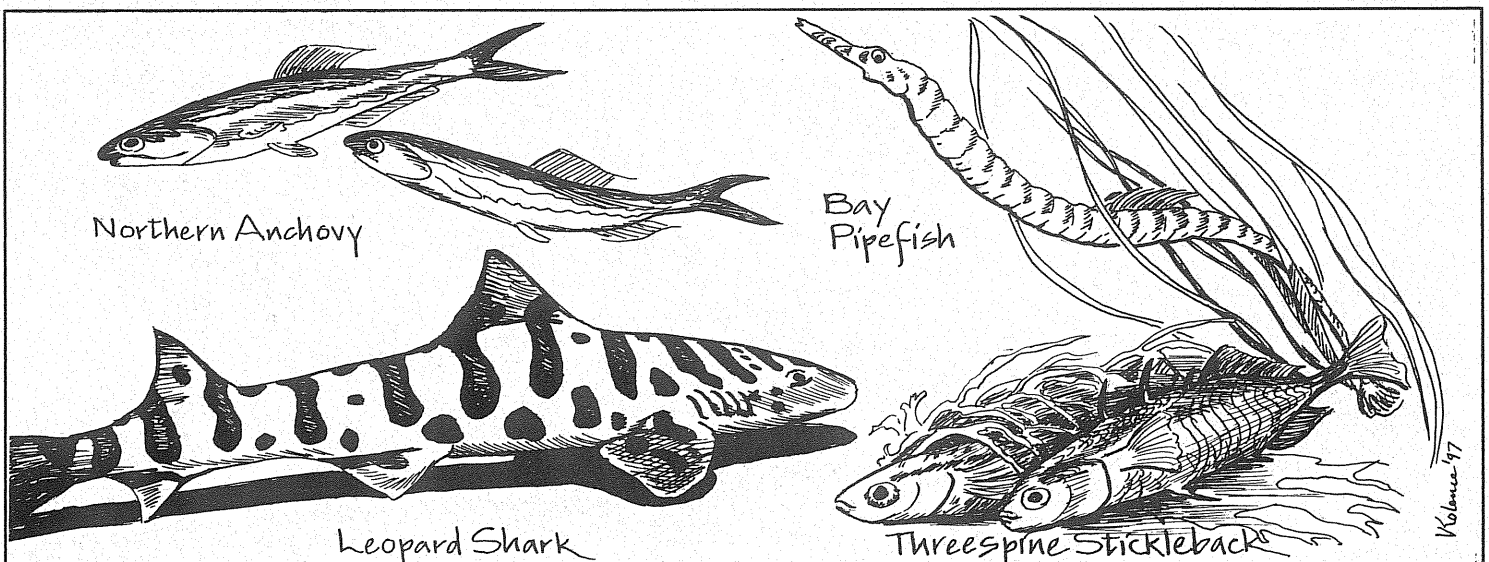
Fishes Common to the South San Francisco Bay

Bay Pipefish can grow to about 14 inches, although their average length in the South Bay is only about 6 inches. In many ways they look like their cousins, the Sea Horses - very long and thin, with a long snout and tiny mouth, and varying in color from green to brown or tan. They live amongst the eel grasses of the Bay, where they are well hidden from their enemies because they closely mimic a stalk of eel grass. They feed on the tiny crustaceans which live on the grasses. Like the Sea Horses, they are poor swimmers, and the males brood the eggs deposited in their pouch by the female until the baby Pipefish are born.

Threespine Stickleback are 4 inches long, and olive or blackish above and silvery below. They are easily identified by the three sharp spines that precede their soft dorsal fin. They feed on insects, crustaceans and algae. Sticklebacks are found throughout the Northern Hemisphere in fresh, brackish, and salt water, but usually spawn only in fresh water. The male Stickleback builds a nest and guards the eggs. They are food for many other fish, as well as seals and sea birds.

Leopard Sharks are well named because, like a leopard, they have bold, dark spots (and bars) on their light gray skin. Males can grow to be about five feet long, and females can grow to seven feet and weigh up to 70 pounds. They have a wide, blunt snout and their eyes are placed high on their heads. They prefer temperate waters, and sandy rock strewn bottoms near rocky reefs. They eat a wide variety of fish and invertebrates, but are primarily scavengers. Not dangerous to man, they are often caught by fisherman who consider them good eating. A large Leopard Shark nursery exists in the South Bay.

Northern Anchovy are the most common anchovy in California. They feed on plankton, and thus have an extremely large mouth for their size. They are blue or greenish above and silvery below. The adult anchovy has a faint silver side stripe. These fish are important as food for other fish as well as birds and marine mammals. They are caught by fishermen in huge numbers, and processed into fish meal and oil. They spawn here in south San Francisco Bay during the Spring and summer.



SOUTH BAY FISHES 2

Topsmelt can grow to 14 inches long, and are green above and silvery below. Their mouths are small, with fork-toothed jaws. Common in the South Bay, they live in schools in kelp beds or rocky areas and feed on plankton and small crustaceans. Topsmelt are very adaptable, living in fresh, brackish, or salt water. Their range is from Vancouver Island in Canada down to the Gulf of California in Mexico. They are easily caught by fishing from piers, and are also sought by commercial fishermen.

Shiner Surfperch are one of a number of species of surfperch found in south San Francisco Bay. They are small, growing only to about 7 inches long, and silvery in color with dark spots crossed by three yellow bars on their sides. They live in schools, in quiet bays or back waters with kelp beds or eel grass. Preferring water depths of 50 feet or less, they range all along the West Coast from Alaska to Baja California. Shiners feed on plankton and fish eggs, and in turn are eaten by bass, halibut, and seals. In common with many other species of surfperch, they give birth to live young.

Pacific Staghorn Sculpin grow to be 18 inches long. They are green-brown or gray, with flattened heads and long branching cheek spines. Staghorn Sculpins range along the Western rim of North America from the Bering Sea to Baja California. They live in groups in shallow waters, where they

lay in wait for small crustaceans to eat. In turn, they are a favorite food of striped bass and other fish, and sea birds such as the Blue Heron.

Starry Flounder, sometimes also called Diamond Flounders or Roughjackets, are brilliantly colored, slow moving flat fish. They have orange, yellow, and black bars on their dorsal, caudal, and anal fins. They can even change their colors to match their surroundings. The "eye-side" of the fish has very rough skin caused by star-shaped scales. "Starries" can live up to 24 years, and attain a length of 3 feet. They are very adaptable to both water salinity and depth. They have been caught in waters ranging from 5 to 1000 feet in depth. They are often even caught in some of the rivers of Northern California. Their range is quite extensive. They can be found all along the Northern Pacific Rim, from Korea to Japan to the Bering Sea, and back down to Central California.

Yellowfin Goby grow to a length of 1 foot. They are brownish with yellow dots on their dorsal fin, and dark patches on their sides. Native to Japan, China, and Korea, they were accidentally introduced into San Francisco Bay in the early 1960's. They have an established population here now, and are bottom dwellers who eat small fish and crustaceans. Good eating, they are considered a special delicacy in Japan.

Edited and Illustrated by Virginia Kolence

