

## **NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System**

### **First Landing Buoy: Fall Seasonal**

Fall weather brings shorter days, cooling temperatures, and strong northerly winds to the waters of the Chesapeake's mouth between Cape Charles and Cape Henry. Those changes signal to fish, crabs, and birds to prepare for winter and, for many, to head out of the Bay to the waters of the Atlantic's continental shelf and points south.

Fish that winter in Florida, like cownose rays, cobia, and spadefish, leave by late September. Bluefish, flounder, and members of the drum family, like speckled and gray trout, spot, croakers, and red drum, swim out in October and November. So do large schools of menhaden that have grazed the Chesapeake's plankton communities during the summer. All of these fish make up a diverse, mass migration, stopping to feed wherever they get the chance.

These congregations of smaller fish cause the larger fish to linger as well, especially many of the rockfish that have spent the summer up the Bay. Meanwhile, the large, mature rockfish that have summered in New England have learned to make a right turn into the Chesapeake in late fall to meet and feed on this exodus of spot, croakers, and especially oily, nutritious menhaden.

Fish-eating birds too have learned to key on these migrations. Loons, gannets, brown pelicans, royal terns, and various species of gulls congregate here to dive on schools of small fish that larger fish drive to the surface. The resulting melee is quite a spectacle to watch. Many humans congregate here too, to watch and to participate in the harvest, especially by catching rockfish.

As fall progresses, you can check the trends and current conditions at [www.buoybay.noaa.gov](http://www.buoybay.noaa.gov). Before heading out on these waters, check conditions at the NOAA CBIBS First Landing Buoy, and check the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area.