Marine Bait Fishes*  
Of Northern California**

**Atherinidae: Silversides Family**

**American Shad**
1 row of dark spots on sides, striations (parallel grooves) on gill covers (in adults), deep body, compressed. Belly sharply keeled. To 30 inches

**Pacific Sardine**
1 to 2 rows of dark spots on sides. Striations (parallel grooves) on gill covers, spine-shaped, belly weakly keeled. To 16.25 inches

**Clupeidae: Herring Family**

**Surf Smelt** (AKA: "day fish") Pectoral fin less than 1/2 distance to pelvic fin, jaw extends to front of eye, day spawner. To 11 inches (pectoral fins highlighted)

**Osmeridae: True Smelts**

**Northern Anchovy**
Round in cross section, large mouth. To 9 inches

**Clupeidae: Herring Family**

**Night Smelt** (AKA: "night fish") Pectoral fin more than 1/2 distance to pelvic fin, jaw extends to rear of eye, night spawner. To 9 inches (pectoral fins highlighted)

**Surf Smelt** (AKA: "day fish") Pectoral fin less than 1/2 distance to pelvic fin, jaw extends to front of eye, day spawner. To 11 inches (pectoral fins highlighted)

**Embiotocidae: Surperch Family**

**Shiner Perch**
Faint yellow bars on sides. Often speckled. To 7 inches (See: Common Surperches of CA.)

**Dwarf Perch**
Black triangle at base of pectoral fin. Irregular stripes crossed by dark bars. Dark blotches on anal and dorsal fins. To 6.25 inches

**Spotfin Surperch**
Silvery. Black spot on anal, dorsal and tips of tail fins; often mistaken for shiner perch. To 8 inches

**Batrachoididae: Toadfish Family**

**Plainfin Midshipman**
"V" shaped series of photopores (small white dots) on "chin," often found under rocks at low tide. May produce audible buzzing sound. To 15 inches

**Pacific Staghorn Sculpin** (AKA: "bullhead") Antler-like spines on "cheeks". No scales, dark blotch on rear of first dorsal fin. To 16 inches

**Cottidae: Sculpin Family**

**Longjaw Mudsucker**
Jaw extends to gills, no bars on tail, head flattened. To 8.5 inches

**Pacific Tomcod**
Short chin barbel, 3 dorsal fins, two anal fins, olive above, white below, edges of fins dusky. To 12 inches

**Gobiidae: Goby Family**

**Yellowfin Goby**
Eyes "frog-like," mouth small, yellow anal fin, tail barred. To 12 inches

**Miscellaneous Bait Fishes**

Produced, designed, photographed by Kirk Lombard. Special thanks to Pete Anacleto, Keith Fraser and Justin Morris for providing specimens.

**"Bait Fishes"** is used here as a generic term for small or, in some cases, medium sized salt water species. Many of these "bait fishes" (surf smelt, jacksmelt, Pacific mackerel, etc) are pursued as sport fish in their own right and are not exclusively used for bait. As regulations for each of these may differ, please check the California Ocean Sport Fishing regulations booklet for rules regarding bag limits, closures, size limits and live bait restrictions, and then... go fishing!

**"Northern California"** refers here to all ocean or bay waters between Pigeon Point in the south and the California-Oregon border in the north.

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