



HABITAT

OPEN WATER

Drifters and Swimmers





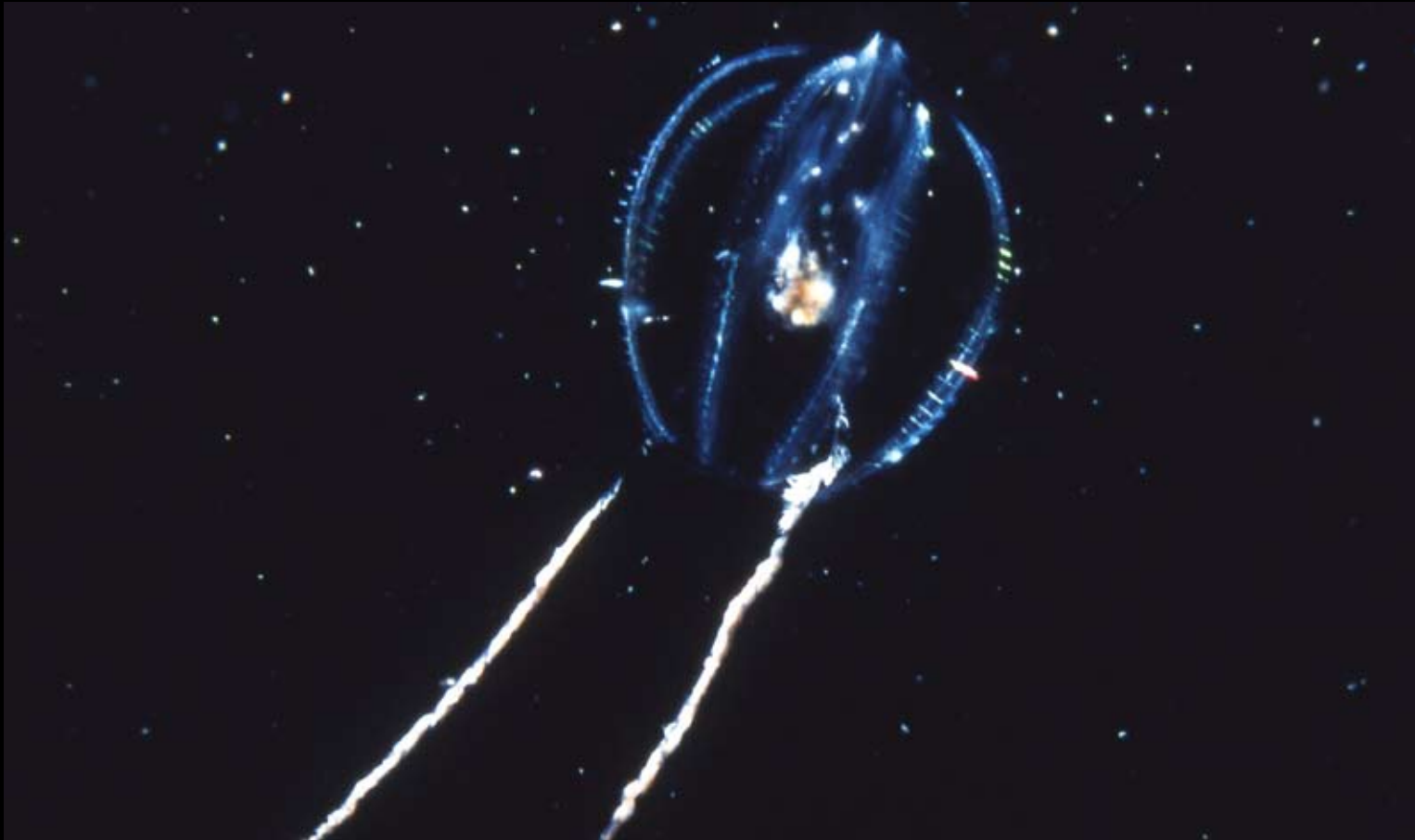
The **water column**, or **pelagic zone**, of Long Island Sound is home to many finfish and other interesting organisms, such as squid, jellyfish, and marine mammals.



Drifting **microalgae** or **phytoplankton** form the base of the food web in estuaries; here are a variety of **microscopic marine diatoms** common to Long Island Sound waters.



Zooplankton are drifting or weakly swimming organisms, ranging in size from this tiny (2-3mm) **copepod** to large jellyfish; most animals in the Sound begin life as part of the zooplankton community, e.g., clams, crabs, lobsters, flounder.



Comb jellies are planktonic animals, propelled through the water by cilia comprising the luminescent bands running along their bodies; unlike true jellyfish, they have no stinging cells.



The **moon jelly** is one of the larger members of the zooplankton community, with a nearly flat, pale pink, orange, or milky-white bell, and a fringe of short tentacles. They are commonly found in the Sound's waters during late spring.



The **lion's mane jellyfish**, with stripes of red or purple radiating from the center of the umbrella and reddish-brown tentacles, are common in the Sound during the summer and early fall.



The colorful **scup (porgies)** feed on both invertebrates and small fish; they are popular with sport anglers for their vigorous fight on the line and are also harvested commercially.



American shad (top) and **Atlantic salmon** (bottom) are anadromous fish, spending their adult lives at sea, and returning to fresh rivers to spawn.



Striped bass are also anadromous but do not spawn in Long Island Sound tributaries; they are popular sport fish which occur in the Sound in the summer, feeding on squid and finfish.



American eels are catadromous, meaning they have the reverse migration pattern of anadromous fish. Adult American eels migrate from freshwater streams or nearshore habitats to the Sargasso Sea, south of Bermuda, to spawn; the adults die there, but the young return to the streams and shore areas.



Endangered **bald eagles** are spectacular winter residents along the Connecticut and Housatonic Rivers. They sit in trees or on ice flows at the water's edge to hunt for fish; eagles will also steal fish from their relative, the osprey.



Buffleheads (males pictured) are small diving ducks that winter along the coast of Long Island Sound, feeding on benthic invertebrates and small fish; they breed in central Canada.



Red-breasted mergansers are common wintering waterfowl in Long Island Sound; these birds dive to capture fish.



Double-crested cormorants occur here year-round; but they are more numerous in summer when they breed on rocky islands. Cormorants are primitive fish-eating birds that are master divers and swimmers; they must occasionally dry their wings in the air because their feathers lack the oil that serves as a water repellent in other waterfowl.





The only true marine mammals that inhabit the Sound regularly are **harbor seals** (spots) and **gray seals** (top); they migrate from northern pupping grounds to winter in the Sound, hauling out to rest on rocky outcrops along the coast.



Long Island Sound is a tremendous resource of fascinating, ecologically and economically-important organisms. By far, **humans** have the greatest impact on the Sound's health and viability, so we must all be aware that pollution and mismanagement can and has degraded the Sound in some areas. **It is up to ALL of us to protect Long Island Sound, a living treasure.**