

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System

Dominion Gooses Reef Buoy: Fall Seasonal

The Dominion Gooses Reef NOAA CBIBS buoy has a number of special sensors on it, including a full set near the bottom, in about 37 feet of water. The contrast between its observations and those at the surface gives a great picture of the way the Chesapeake Bay behaves as the season changes. You can follow the fall season on the CBIBS website, www.buoybay.noaa.gov.

With falling surface temperatures now, that upper layer has begun to sink, effectively “turning over” or mixing the water column and bringing oxygen-deprived bottom water to the surface for wind and rain to refresh. Watch the differences between surface and bottom begin to diminish as the turnover process proceeds.

For fish and birds in and along the Chesapeake’s main stem, the falling water temperatures signal the prospect of winter and the need to fatten up for that lean season. Young-of-the-year menhaden, a.k.a. “peanut bunkers,” and their two-year-old kin school up in preparation for migration to coastal waters off North Carolina. The majority of the fish in those dense schools will survive to make the trip, but a significant number will feed predators along the way, ranging from fishing birds like loons, gulls, and gannets to bluefish and rockfish.

Most fall visitors to this part of Capt. Smith’s Trail are carrying fishing rods. It’s a great time to be out there, but be sure you have enough boat under you, that you dress for the weather, and that you pay prudent attention to the weather information that the NOAA CBIBS Gooses Reef Buoy gives you. Be sure also to check the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area.