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## Guide to South Carolina Saltwater Fishes

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# South Carolina Department of Natural Resources

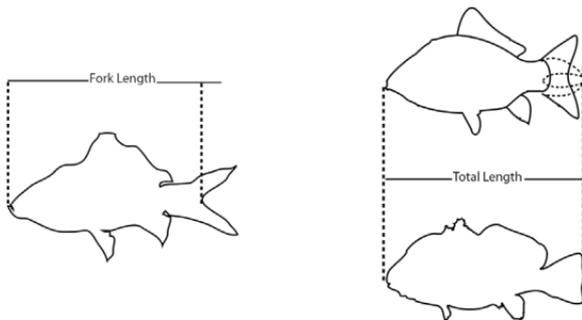
The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources has information to help you learn more about marine resources.

		<b>Other useful numbers:</b>	
Marine Resources Division	(843) 953-9300	Buy a License 24 Hours	1-866-714-3611
Coastal Law Enforcement	(843) 953-9307	Boating/Hunter Education	1-800-277-4301
Operation Game Thief/ Coast Watch	1-800-922-5431	Marine Mammal Stranding	1-800-922-5431
Boat Titling/Licensing	(843) 953-9301	Report the Recapture of a Tagged Fish	1-888-824-7472

## Measuring Your Fish

### How to Properly Measure a Saltwater Fish

TL=total length measure: From the closed mouth (snout) to the tip of the tail fin when pinched together. It is a straight line measure, not over the curvature of the body. FL=fork length measure: From the tip of the closed mouth (snout) to the center of the fork of the tail. It is a straight line measure, not over the curvature of the body.



## How to use this guide

This identification guide provides a quick reference for marine fish that are most often encountered by South Carolina saltwater sport fishermen. To facilitate identification, species are grouped by family so that similar-looking fish will be found in close proximity to one another. Anglers can identify a fish by matching it to the color drawings provided in the identification sheets. Key identifying characters as well as those characters that distinguish each fish from similar looking species are presented. Each species' page includes information on the common size range encountered by anglers fishing in South Carolina and adjacent Federal waters and their approximate maximum total length in inches. Common and maximum sizes for fish species presented in this guide are intended only as a rough estimation. For precise lengths, scientific publications should be consulted. The distribution, habitat, effective angling methods, and food quality are also provided.



**COMMON NAME**

*Scientific name*

## Basic fish information

Fish are vertebrates, which means they have a backbone. They are cold-blooded and well-suited for living in water. Many adaptations allow a fish to survive in the water, some of which include:

- Gills:** Fish use gills to breathe in the water. Water is forced over the gills, which then pick up oxygen from the water and dispose of carbon dioxide and other wastes.
- Slime Layer:** Fish are covered with a layer of mucus that helps protect the fish from disease. Always minimize fish handling to protect the slime layer for fish you plan to release.
- Fins:** Fish use fins as a means for locomotion. The caudal fin provides momentum, the pectoral fins help with direction, and other fins help with stability in the water.
- Eyes:** Fish can detect colors and see for short distances. They use vision to escape predators and locate food.
- Taste:** Some fish have taste buds not only in their mouths, but also on the outside of their head and on their fins. Many fish, such as catfish, have a well-developed sense of taste.
- Smell:** Fish use their sense of smell to locate food and to assist them in migrating. They have nares, which contain olfactory organs that allow them to differentiate chemicals in the water.
- Touch:** Fish experience a sense of touch.
- Hearing:** Fish have inner ear bones called otoliths, which allow them to sense vibrations or sounds. Scientists can use an otolith to determine the age of a fish.
- Lateral Line:** Fish have a lateral line that acts as their “sixth sense.” The lateral line contains sensory pores that can detect pressure changes around them in the water. This allows the fish an additional mechanism to locate food and escape predators.

# Basic Fish Terminology

**adipose eyelid** – skin-like covering on eye, may cover entire or only part of eye

**adipose fin** – a fleshy projection, fin-like but without rays, found behind dorsal fins in primitive fishes

**anadromous** – saltwater fish that ascend freshwater streams to spawn

**anal fin** – single fin on the median line of the body just behind anus or vent

**anterior** – situated toward the front; opposite of posterior

**barbel** – a fleshy projection in the form of a thread or flap, usually found on head, chin, or around mouth or nostrils

**benthic** – pertaining to or dwelling on the bottom

**catadramous** – fish that descend from freshwater streams to the sea to spawn

**caudal** – pertaining to the tail region, posterior

**caudal fin** – unpaired fin at posterior end of body, commonly called the tail fin

**caudal peduncle** – body region behind the anal and dorsal fins, and just forward of caudal fin

**claspers** – modified pelvic fins of sharks and skates that serve as male reproductive organs

**ctenoid scale** – scales bearing tiny spines on posterior edge that are rough to the touch

**depth** – greatest vertical measurement of a fish's body

**dorsal fin** – unpaired median fin on back, sometimes partially or completely divided

**finlets** – small, free, fin-like projections behind the dorsal and anal fins

**fork length** – distance from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail

**gills** – respiratory organs covered by an operculum in bony fishes

**gill rakers** – stiff projections on the inner or anterior surfaces of the gill arch that are used for straining food

**girth** – greatest body diameter

**heterocercal tail** – upper lobe of caudal fin much larger than lower, characteristically seen in sharks

**homocercal tail** – lobes of caudal fin nearly equal, vertebral column does not extend along upper margin of the fin

# Basic Fish Terminology

**ichthyology** – the scientific study of fishes

**keel** – a ridge, or elevated line, present on the body of many fish and sharks

**lateral line** – a series of pores that form a line along the sides of the body, sensory in function

**littoral** – pertaining to or dwelling along the shore

**nictitating membrane** – a thin, transparent flap that can be moved over the eye, also referred to as the third eyelid of sharks and skates

**ocellus** – an eye-like, dark spot surrounded by lighter pigment on the body or fins

**operculum** – a bony flap that covers the gills

**oviparity** – a mode of reproduction where the female shark lays eggs in the form of egg cases, which they attach to algae or corals; embryo development occurs outside the female's body

**ovoviviparity** – a mode of reproduction where fertilized eggs develop within the body of the female; the embryos do not receive direct nourishment from the mother other than the initial investment of the egg production

**pectoral fins** – paired fins located just behind the gill openings

**pelagic** – pertaining to or dwelling in or on the surface of open water

**pelvic fins** – paired fins located behind and/or below the pectoral fins, also called ventral fins

**posterior** – situated toward the rear of the animal; opposite of anterior

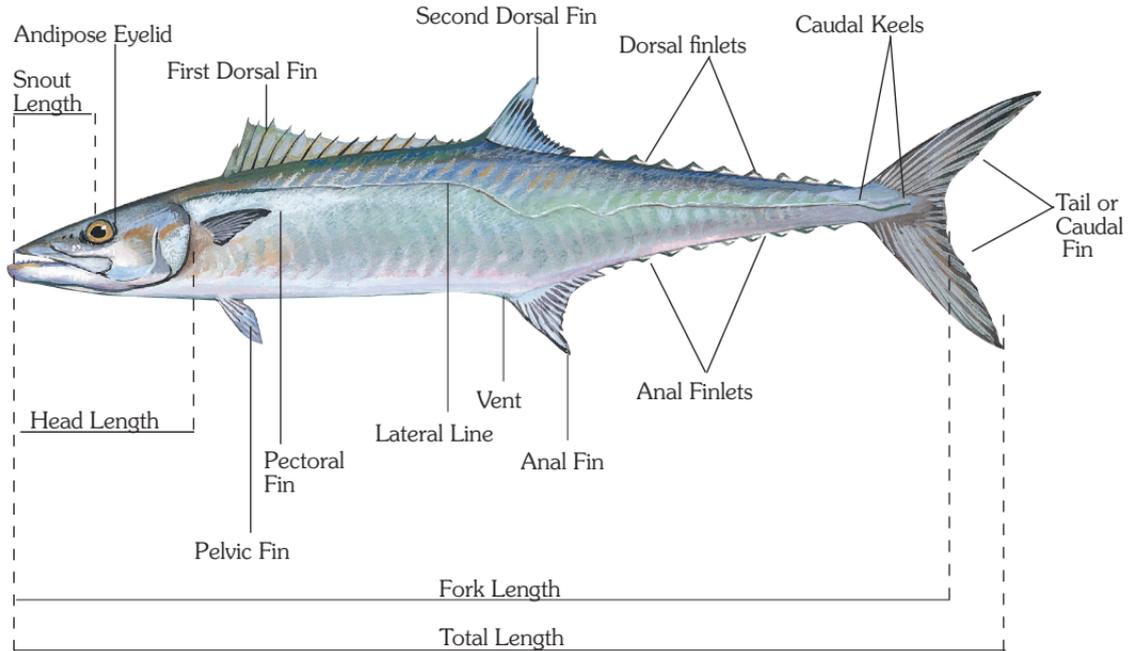
**spiracle** – a small opening on the head or neck of some sharks and skates

**total length** – the distance from the tip of the snout to the posterior edge of the tail fin

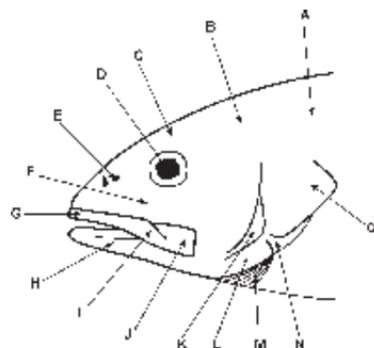
**vent** – posterior opening of the digestive tract

**viviparity** – a mode of shark reproduction where fertilized eggs hatch and develop within the body of the female; the female shark provides nourishment for the embryos as they develop inside of her

# Basic Fish Terminology

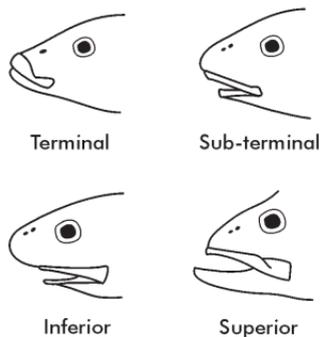


# Basic Fish Terminology

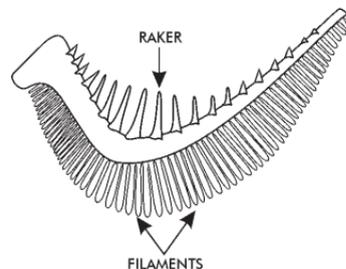


- A. NAPE
- B. INTERORBITAL
- C. EYE
- D. NOSTRILS
- E. PREMAXILLARY
- F. MANDIBLE
- G. PREOPERCLE
- H. INTEROPERCLE
- I. BRANCHIOSTERGALS
- J. SUBOPERCLE
- K. OPERCLE

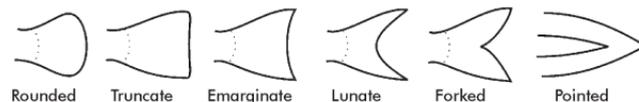
## MOUTH TYPE



## GILL



## TAIL TYPE



## Saltwater Fishing: Rules and Regulations

The following laws pertain to recreational saltwater fishing, shrimping, crabbing and shellfishing. Individuals (age 16 and older) harvesting marine resources, including finfish, oysters, clams, shrimp and crab must purchase an annual, temporary or 3 Year Saltwater Recreational Fishing License – unless fishing on a licensed public fishing pier; fishing on a licensed charter vessel while underhire; using 3 or fewer drop nets, 3 or fewer fold up traps, or 3 or fewer handlines with no hooks and a single bait per line (chicken necking); or shrimp baiting (which requires a shrimp baiting license).

Fishing piers and chartered vessels charging a fee for fishing must purchase an annual Public Fishing Pier or Charter Vessel license, respectively. Applications for Public Fishing Pier and Charter Vessel Licenses are available from the SCDNR office in Charleston.

Any person engaged in selling any fish or fishery product, including bait harvested in SC state waters, must first obtain the appropriate license. Regulations concerning commercial saltwater fishing are provided with commercial licenses and are available through the Marine Resources Division at the address below.

For more information, contact: SCDNR Licensing,  
P.O. Box 12559, Charleston, SC 29422,  
843-953-9301, <http://www.dnr.sc.gov>.

For federal fishery limits and regulations,  
contact: South Atlantic Fishery Management  
Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201,  
North Charleston, SC 29405, 843-571-4366,  
[www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net).

**To learn about the projects and programs that received support from the Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Program this fiscal year, visit <http://saltwaterfishing.sc.gov>.**

# TARPONS

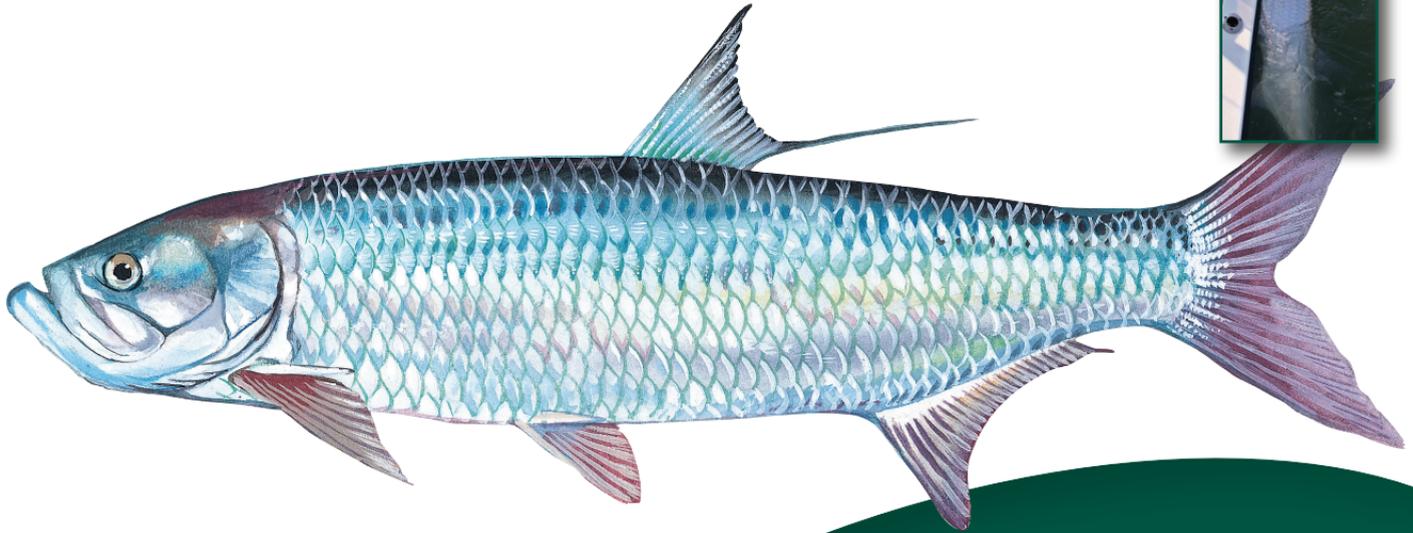


**LADYFISH**

*Elops saurus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Ladyfish are inshore species that prefer bays, estuaries, tidal pools and canals, and occasionally enter freshwater.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body long and slender with small scales covering the entire body, which is silver in color. Mouth terminal, tail deeply forked.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar species:</b>	This fish has the appearance of a small tarpon. Tarpon have a greatly extended last dorsal fin ray that is filamentous, and the body has very large scales.
<b>Average Size:</b>	2 - 3 pounds, 18 - 24 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	6 pounds, 36 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Adult ladyfish feed mainly on fish and crustaceans. Schools are often seen pursuing food near the surface.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Although ladyfish form large schools close to shore, spawning occurs offshore.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are caught either by trolling or by casting with both natural and artificial baits. They are known for their fighting and jumping ability on light tackle.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Poor. Ladyfish are very bony and not generally eaten.
<b>Misc.:</b>	The Ladyfish is also known as the tenpounder.

# TARPONS



**TARPON**

*Megalops atlanticus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Tarpon avoid colder water and are most abundant in estuaries and inshore waters. However, they are also found in coastal freshwater lakes and rivers, offshore marine waters, and occasionally around reefs.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body moderately deep with large scales, lower jaw projecting. Origin of the dorsal fin near the mid-point of the body, last dorsal fin ray filamentous and very long.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Ladyfish are similar in overall appearance but much smaller than tarpon, reaching only four to six pounds. The last dorsal ray is not filamentous or longer than the anterior rays. There are 100 to 120 scales along the lateral line compared to only 40 to 48 in the tarpon.
<b>Average Size:</b>	40 - 50 pounds, 40 - 60 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	150 pounds, 96 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Tarpon often travel in schools and are opportunistic eaters, feeding on a variety of fish and crabs.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Tarpon begin gathering together in May and June in staging areas near the coast where schools swim in a circular, rotating motion. This behavior is known as a “daisy chain” and may be an activity that prepares the fish for spawning. The actual departure to offshore spawning areas is most likely related to lunar phases and tides.
<b>Angling:</b>	Tarpon are known as a hard fighting game fish that often leap out of the water when hooked.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Poor. Tarpon are not generally eaten.
<b>Misc.:</b>	The tarpon can survive in a variety of habitats and salinities and can even gulp air for extended periods when oxygen concentrations are low in the water.

# HERRINGS



**AMERICAN SHAD**

*Alosa sapidissima*

<b>Habitat:</b>	American shad are distributed along the Atlantic coast from Canada to central Florida. These fish are anadromous.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body compressed, its depth variable and increases with size, belly with scutes forming a distinct keel. Back bluish green with metallic luster fading to silver on sides, dark spot on shoulder followed by several more spots, fins pale green. Dorsal fin base slightly anterior to center point of body. Upper jaw with a distinct median notch, teeth present in jaws. Gill rakers number 59 to 73 on lower limb of anterior gill arch. Membranes surrounding internal organs pale.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The back of the blueback herring is dark blue, and the fins are slightly yellow to greenish. The gill rakers are slender, and there are 45 to 51 on lower limb of anterior gill arch. The membranes surrounding internal organs are black. The hickory shad has obscure spots on its sides behind a dark spot on shoulder and usually narrow dark lines on upper part of body. Gill rakers number 18 to 23 on lower limb of anterior gill arch. The membranes surrounding internal organs are pale. Menhaden have enlarged pre-dorsal scales on both sides of the middle of the back and 7 pelvic rays compared to 9 in <i>Alosa</i> species.
<b>Average Size:</b>	4 pounds, 16 - 20 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	12 pounds, 24 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	American shad are filter feeders, straining water through their gill rakers, and feeding on small crustaceans, algae, and insects.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	American shad are anadromous. They spawn in the spring, usually in March and April, as water temperatures approach 55° F. Adults may travel hundreds of miles upstream before spawning. Young fish remain in the lower reaches of rivers and in estuarine waters until they have grown large and old enough to return to the ocean.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are plankton feeders; however, they are often thought of as game fish. They are taken on hook and line with artificial lures known as shad darts.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. This fish has many small bones. The roe is considered a delicacy and is featured by many lowcountry restaurants.

# HERRINGS



## BLUEBACK HERRING

*Alosa aestivalis*

<b>Habitat:</b>	These fish range from Nova Scotia to Florida and frequently travel in large schools.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body moderately compressed, belly with scutes forming a distinct keel. Back dark blue, fins slightly yellow to greenish. Dorsal fin near center point of body. Upper jaw with a distinct median notch and minute teeth. Gill rakers slender, 41 to 51 on lower limb of anterior gill arch. Membranes surrounding internal organs black.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The hickory shad has fewer gill rakers on lower limb of the anterior gill arch (18 to 23), and the membranes surrounding the internal organs are pale. American shad have many more gill rakers (59 to 73) on the lower limb, and the membranes surrounding the internal organs are also pale. Menhaden have enlarged predorsal scales on both sides of the midline of the back.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1/3 pound, 10 - 12 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	1 pound, 14 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Blueback herring are filter feeders, straining water through their gills and feeding on small crustaceans, algae, and insects.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Blueback herring are anadromous. They spawn during spring, usually in March and April, as water temperatures begin to warm. Young fish remain in the lower reaches of rivers and in estuarine waters until they have grown strong enough to return to the ocean.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are not normally targeted by recreational fishermen and are infrequently taken on a baited hook. They are used as fishing bait and are also harvested commercially for crab bait.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Poor. These fish are not generally eaten fresh, but rather, they are usually pickled and smoked.

# HERRINGS



## THREADFIN SHAD

*Dorosoma petenense*

<b>Habitat:</b>	The threadfin shad inhabits larger rivers and reservoirs primarily, but it is also found in brackish water.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	The threadfin shad has bluish gray on its upper side that fades into a silver side and bell. There is a prominent purple to black spot on the upper side of the body just beyond the operculum or gill flap. The caudal fin tends to be yellow. A distinguishingly long dorsal fin ray occurs at the back of the dorsal fin.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	American shad are considerably larger and have small spots along the upper side of the body. The gizzard shad has a downward pointing mouth and a very blunt snout.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 ounce, 2 - 3 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	3 ounces
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Microscopic plants and animals by filter feeding with their gill rakers which function like a strainer catching food.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Threadfin shad spawn from April to July in shallow shoreline areas, between dawn to sunrise over submerged plants or other objects. The eggs sink and stick to various substrates until they hatch.
<b>Angling:</b>	Threadfin shad are used primarily as bait by anglers fishing for larger species. They can be caught using sabiki rigs.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Poor

# TOADFISHES & LIZARDFISHES



**OYSTER TOADFISH**

*Opsanus tau*

<b>Habitat:</b>	The toadfish is primarily an inshore, bottom-dwelling species, inhabiting rocky bottoms and reefs, jetties, and wrecks. They frequently live among litter and can tolerate polluted water.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body scaleless, color variable, usually brown with orange to yellow mottling and a white belly. Head broad and flattened with many barbels and fleshy flaps. Mouth large with short, stubby teeth. Eyes on top of head directed upward.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The similar looking leopard toadfish found in deeper offshore waters has a mottled belly.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 - 2 pounds, 8 - 12 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	4 pounds, 15 ounces; 14 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Toadfish consume incidental vegetation as well as crabs, anemones, clams, shrimp, sea urchins, and small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	After the female toadfish lays her eggs, the male guards the nest and wards off predators while eggs are incubating (about 3 weeks). While both sexes are known for the grunting sound they make when caught or threatened, males produce a loud foghorn sound to attract females during spawning.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are caught incidentally while fishing for other bottom fish. They will bite any type of live or cut baits.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Poor. These fish are not normally eaten.
<b>Misc.:</b>	They must be handled with care because of their strong jaws and the stiff spines in their fins.

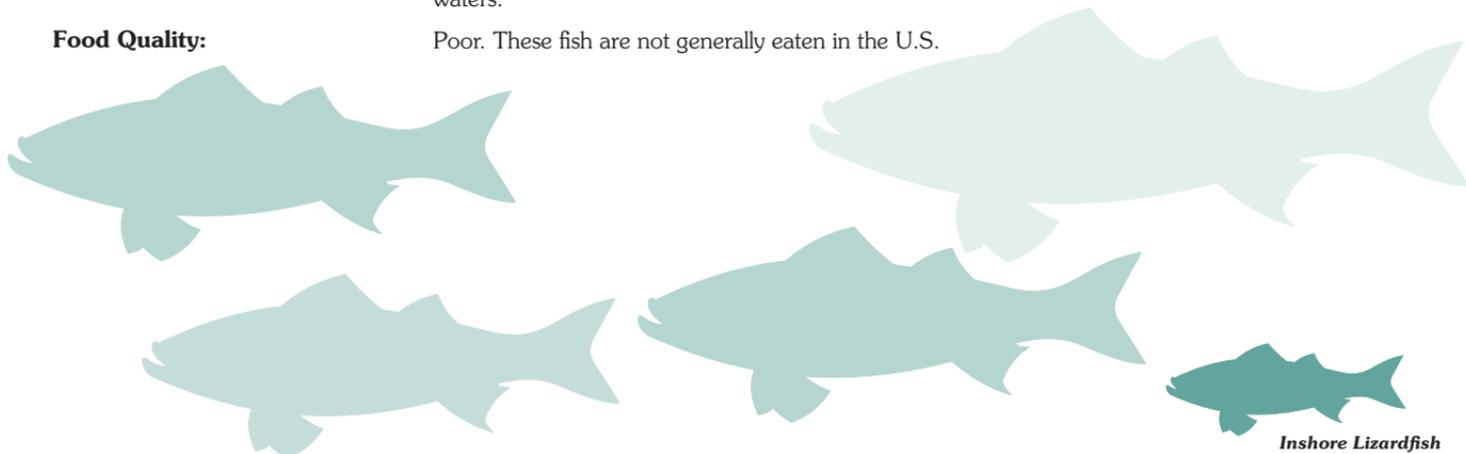
# TOADFISHES & LIZARDFISHES



**INSHORE LIZARDFISH**

*Synodus foetens*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Inshore lizardfish occur in inshore waters and frequently enter brackish waters.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Long, cylindrical body that is brownish with a green tint, often with some mottling and spots, belly white. Adipose fin present. Mouth with numerous, large teeth.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The large teeth, adipose fin and long, cylindrical body separate lizardfish from other types of fish. Several species of lizardfish may be encountered in South Carolina offshore waters, but the inshore lizardfish is the only typical inshore resident.
<b>Average Size:</b>	2 pounds, 10 - 14 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	2 - 3 pounds, 16 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Lizardfish are voracious carnivores that are capable of burying themselves in sediment where they lie in wait for small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs throughout the year in open water. Newly hatched larvae are found near the surface of the open ocean.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are taken primarily by bottom fishing with live and cut baits in coastal and inshore waters.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Poor. These fish are not generally eaten in the U.S.



# TEMPERATE BASSES



**STRIPED BASS**

*Morone saxatilis*

<b>Habitat:</b>	While found in the major freshwater rivers in South Carolina, striped bass are also common along coastal inshore environments and tidal tributaries, but they never range more than a few miles offshore. They are often found around piers, jetties, tide pools, rips, flats, and rocks.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body moderately elongated in young becoming stouter in adults. Seven or eight dark horizontal stripes form scale rows on upper sides, area between eyes not scaled. Two dorsal fins present, the first spiny and the second soft-rayed. Anal fin with three strong spines and seven to 13 soft rays. Mouth terminal, teeth small, two tooth patches on tongue, lower jaw projecting slightly. Tail fin moderately forked.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	White, yellow and hybrid striped bass are not generally encountered in marine or estuarine waters. White bass are silvery with faint, horizontal stripes on the sides of the body, and there is only one tooth patch on tongue. Hybrid bass have two tooth patches on tongue and seven or eight broken horizontal stripes above lateral line.
<b>Average Size:</b>	5 - 10 pounds, 18 - 36 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	78 pounds, 60 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Striped bass are voracious and opportunistic feeders that prey heavily on small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs in fresh or slightly brackish waters where the current is strong enough to keep the eggs suspended and when the water temperature is between 50 and 73° F. Females may release 180,000 to 4.5 million eggs, depending on size. When mating, several smaller males accompany each female. The spawning fish swim near the surface of the water, turning on their side and rolling and splashing (sometimes called a “rock fight”). Semi-buoyant eggs are released and then float with the current until hatching.
<b>Angling:</b>	The striped bass is South Carolina’s state fish. It is caught both in fresh and estuarine waters by a wide variety of methods, including trolling, jigging, bait fishing, surf casting and fly-fishing. Both natural and artificial baits are effective.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. The white, flaky flesh of striped bass freezes well and may be prepared numerous ways.

# TEMPERATE BASSES



**WHITE PERCH**

*Morone americana*

<b>Habitat:</b>	White perch occur in brackish waters from Canada to South Carolina.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body deep and compressed, silvery in color, young have faint longitudinal stripes. Spinous and soft dorsal fins connected. The second anal spine nearly as long as the third spine.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Small striped bass may be separated by seven or eight dark, horizontal stripes on sides. The first and second dorsal fins are slightly separated, and the second spine of the anal fin is shorter than the third spine. Most other similar species have either three opercular spines, or only two anal fin spines, or a tail fin that is not forked.
<b>Average Size:</b>	$\frac{3}{4}$ pound, 8 to 10 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	4 pounds, 12 ounces; 12 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	White perch feed on a variety of small fish, insects, crustaceans, and other invertebrates.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	During the spring, April through June, white perch migrate from estuarine waters into freshwater streams to spawn. A female may spawn as many as 300,000 eggs, which are immediately fertilized by male fish. Depending on the water temperature, these eggs will hatch in as little as 30 hours to as long as six days.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are caught on or near the bottom, while fishing with most types of live or cut baits.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. White, flaky flesh that may be broiled or fried.

# SEA BASSES



**BANK SEA BASS**

*Centropristis ocyurus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Bank sea bass are found offshore in waters from 50 - 500 feet and typically associate with hard-bottom areas.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body color light, sides with three horizontal rows of black blotches, numerous blue and yellow stripes and spots on head, fins and forward part of body, middle tail ray and dorsal spines with jet black spots.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Rock seabass have long fleshy filaments coming off the dorsal spines. Black seabass have a dark body, nearly black.
<b>Average Size:</b>	½ - 1 pound, 6 - 8 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	10.5 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	The bank sea bass is an opportunistic carnivore that uses its large mouth to swallow crabs, shrimp, brittle stars, callico scallops and small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Nearly all individuals of this species begin life as females and change to males as they age and grow. Collections suggest that fertile females spawn offshore in the early spring, usually for the first time when they are 2 or 3 years old.
<b>Angling:</b>	Can be caught on the bottom using squid, live baits, or cut bait. They are a common bycatch when fishing for snapper and grouper.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Good

# SEA BASSES



**BLACK SEA BASS**

*Centropristis striata*

<b>Habitat:</b>	The black sea bass is a bottom-dwelling species found around wrecks, reefs, piers, and jetties, as well as over beds of shells and rock. They prefer warmer waters, living offshore in winter and moving inshore during the spring.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body color very dark. Preopercle finely serrated without a strong spine or spiny lobe, opercle with three flat spines. Dorsal fin single, notched with 10 spines and 11 soft rays. Tail fin rounded, often with a single upper ray elongated in adults.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The body color of the bank sea bass is light with three horizontal rows of black blotches on the sides as well as numerous blue and yellow stripes. Spots are present on the head, fins and forward part of body. Dorsal spines and middle ray of tail fin have jet black spots. Rock sea bass also have a light body color with seven brownish bars on the upper sides, a yellowish band across the anal fin, and long, fleshy filaments on the dorsal spines. A distinct black spot is present at the base of the last three dorsal spines.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 - 3 pounds, 10 - 12 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	9 pounds, 18 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Black sea bass feed on clams, shrimp, worms, crabs, and small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs in March through May. Black sea bass are hermaphroditic, beginning their lives as females and later developing into males.
<b>Angling:</b>	Still and drift fishing on or near the bottom with squid and live and cut baits are effective methods of catching these fish. They often voraciously attack a baited hook.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. Black sea bass have white, firm (but flaky) flesh that is a favorite of many fishermen.

# SEA BASSES

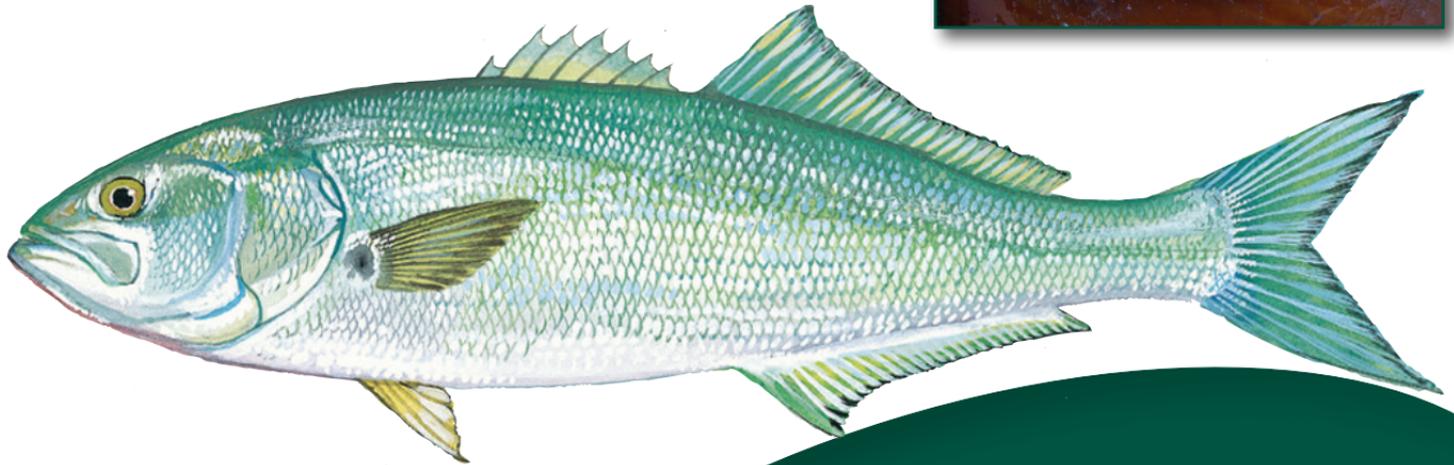


**ROCK SEA BASS**

*Centropristis philadelphica*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Rock sea bass are found over sandy and muddy bottoms in 30 to 60 feet of water, primarily in estuaries.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body color light, seven brownish bars on upper sides, yellowish band across anal fin. Dorsal spines with long, fleshy filaments, distinct black spot at base of last three dorsal spines.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Black sea bass have a dark body color, nearly black, and are dark blue between eyes (breeding males). The median fins are uniform in color, and the tail fin of adults has a single, elongated, upper ray. The body color of the bank sea bass is light, and the sides have three horizontal rows of black blotches with numerous blue and yellow stripes and spots on the head. The fins and forward part of body, middle ray of tail fin, and dorsal spines have jet black spots.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 - 2 pounds, 6 - 8 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	3 pounds, 10 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Rock sea bass feed on small fish, shrimp, crabs, and other small crustaceans.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Rock sea bass spawn in early spring from January through March. Eggs are deposited in the open waters or on the sea floor.
<b>Angling:</b>	Still and drift fishing on or near the bottom with squid and live and cut baits are effective methods of catching these fish.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Good.

# BLUEFISHES



**BLUEFISH**

*Pomatomus saltatrix*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Bluefish are typically found in shallow coastal waters traveling in schools.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body compressed, back greenish-blue, side and belly silvery, head large. Mouth terminal, jaw teeth prominent and in a single row. Two dorsal fins, first short and low with seven or eight spines, the second long with one spine and 23 to 28 rays. Tail fin forked.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	No other species is of similar appearance.
<b>Average Size:</b>	3 pounds, 10 - 20 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	31 pounds, 38 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Bluefish are extremely voracious and even cannibalistic. They are known to target schools of menhaden, mackerel, and herring and will hold feeding frenzies, tearing through schools of small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs mainly in the summer when bluefish migrate out to open seas. Eggs are released and drift along with plankton on the surface, hatching about two days after fertilization.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are known to bite anything. Fishing methods include trolling and casting live and dead baits from boats, piers, and the shore.
<b>Food quality:</b>	Good. Bluefish quickly become soft and do not freeze or keep well.

# COBIAS



**COBIA**

*Rachycentron canadum*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Cobia can be found in shallow continental shelf waters, and often congregate along reefs and around buoys, pilings, wrecks, anchored boats, and other stationary or floating objects. They are also found over mud, gravel, and sand bottoms, as well as natural and artificial reefs at depths of up to 60 feet.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body elongated, back and sides dark brown with two sharply defined silvery bands, belly yellowish. Head broad and depressed. Mouth large and terminal. First dorsal fin with seven to nine short and strong isolated spines not connected by a membrane, second dorsal long with 27 to 33 rays. Upper lobe of tail fin longer than lower lobe.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Sharksuckers (remora) are very similar to young cobia but may be distinguished by the presence of an adhesive disc on top of the head.
<b>Average Size:</b>	15 pounds, 30 - 48 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	150 pounds, 60 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Cobia feed mostly on crustaceans, particularly shrimp and crabs, as well as eels, squid, and various small fish found in shallow coastal waters.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	It is believed that cobia spawn in offshore waters between April and May.
<b>Angling:</b>	These are strong, hard-hitting game fish that frequently make numerous runs. They are caught trolling, bottom fishing, jigging and casting live baits and lures. Effective live baits include soft and hard crabs, eels, squid, and small fish.
<b>Food quality:</b>	Excellent. Cobia have white, solid flesh, considered by many to be one of the best tasting saltwater fish.
<b>Misc.:</b>	This species is the only member of the cobia family.

# JACKS

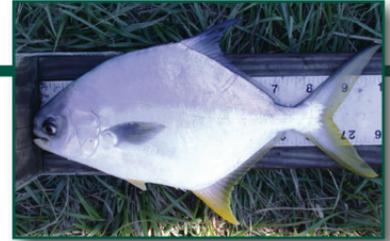


**CREVALLE JACK**

*Caranx hippos*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Creville jack can tolerate a wide range of salinities. They inhabit coastal brackish waters, and may go up rivers. They are regularly found over inshore reefs, and in harbors and protected bays from May through October and are common in depths up to 130 feet.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body greenish to bluish above and silvery-white below. Juveniles often have five dark bars on body. Fins yellowish with a large, oval, black spot on the pectoral fins. Chest lacks scales except for a small patch in front of the pelvic fins. First rays of second dorsal fin and anal fin greatly elongated.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Other jacks and similar looking fish lack the rounded, dark spot on the pectoral fins.
<b>Average Size:</b>	3 - 5 pounds, 18 - 24 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	55 pounds, 40 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	This species is known as a ravenous predator, feeding on shrimp and other invertebrates, as well as smaller fish. They will often corner a school of fish or will chase prey onto beaches and against seawalls.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs offshore from March through September.
<b>Angling:</b>	These very fast-swimming fish are known for their strength and fighting ability. They are caught by casting and trolling with natural or artificial lures.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Poor. These fish are not considered a good eating fish. Larger fish frequently contain parasitic worms.

# JACKS



**FLORIDA POMPANO**



*Trachinotus carolinus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Florida pompano are abundant in and throughout shallow coastal inshore waters over sand and shell bottoms from June through October.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body deep and laterally compressed, back grayish-blue fading into yellow on lower sides, belly white, scales very small. Teeth very small, none on tongue. Six small spines in front of dorsal fin. Dorsal fin with one spine followed by 22 to 27 soft rays. Two spines in front of anal fin. Anal fin with one spine and 20 to 24 soft rays.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The permit has fewer soft rays in the anal fin (16 to 19 compared to 20 to 24). The almaco jack and rudderfish have caudal peduncle grooves and relatively short anal fin bases. The soft dorsal and anal fins of the leatherjacket are followed by 10 or more semidetached finlets.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 - 3 pounds, 10 - 14 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	7 pounds, 18 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	The pompano feeds on mollusks, crustaceans, other invertebrates, and small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs offshore between March and September.
<b>Angling:</b>	Florida pompano are caught on light tackle in the surf along beaches, in shallow waters, and around inlets.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. These fish have white, firm flesh that may be fried, broiled or grilled.

# TRIPLETAILS

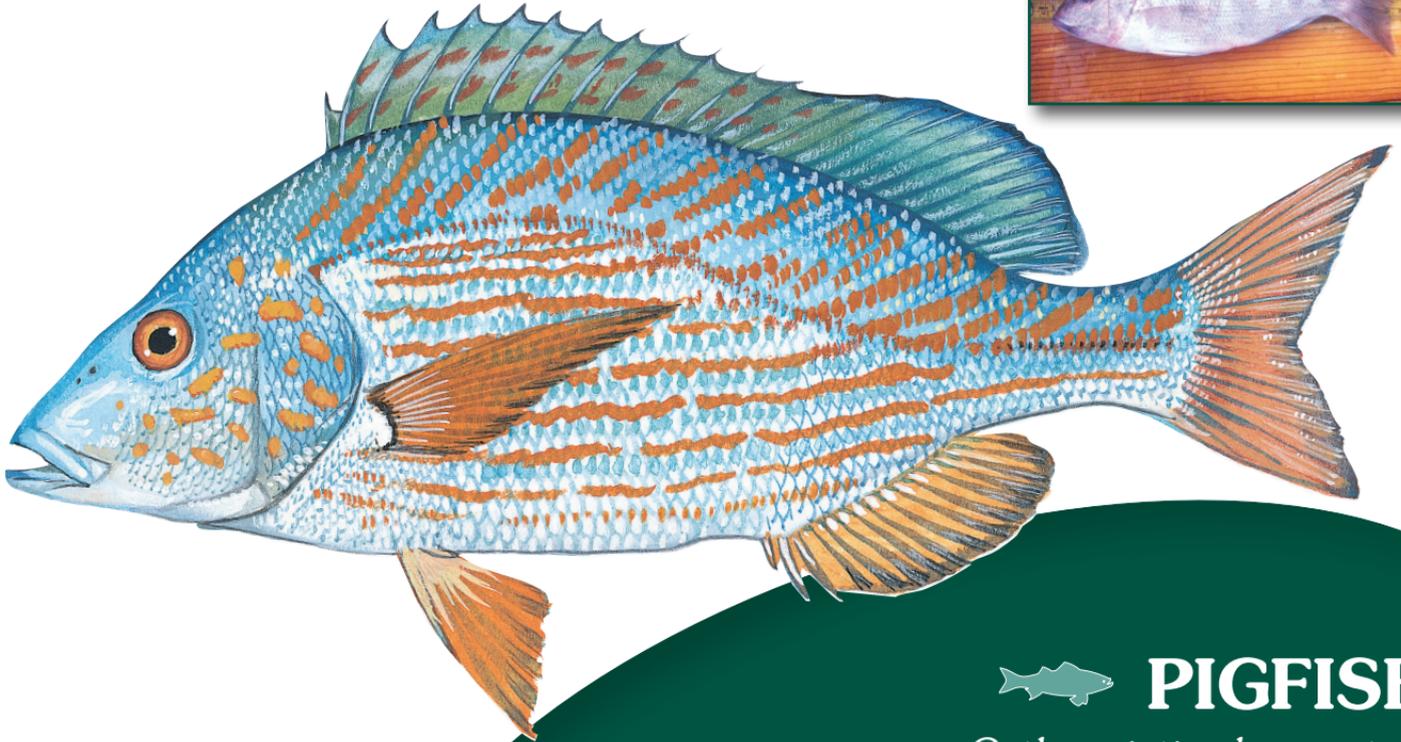


**TRIPLETAIL**

*Lobotes surinamensis*

<b>Habitat:</b>	The tripletail inhabits coastal waters and commonly enters muddy estuaries in depths of up to 20 feet. Tripletail can swim or float on their side among floating objects.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	A deep-bodied fish with rounded, symmetrical dorsal and anal fins which extend far back on the body so that the fish appears to have a three-lobed tail. Body color yellow-brown to dark brown with scattered spots and mottling. Mouth superior with no teeth on roof of mouth.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Because of the three-lobed tail, no other fish in the area has a similar appearance.
<b>Average Size:</b>	Less than 20 pounds, 10 - 18 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	50 pounds, 36 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	The tripletail feeds on herring,menhaden, anchovies, and eels, as well as shrimp, crabs, and squid.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs in spring and summer.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are known for their strength. They are caught on both natural baits such as live and dead shrimp, as well as artificial lures.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent.
<b>Misc.:</b>	The tripletail gets its name from its second dorsal and anal fins, which extend far back on the body so that the fish appears to have three tails.

# GRUNTS

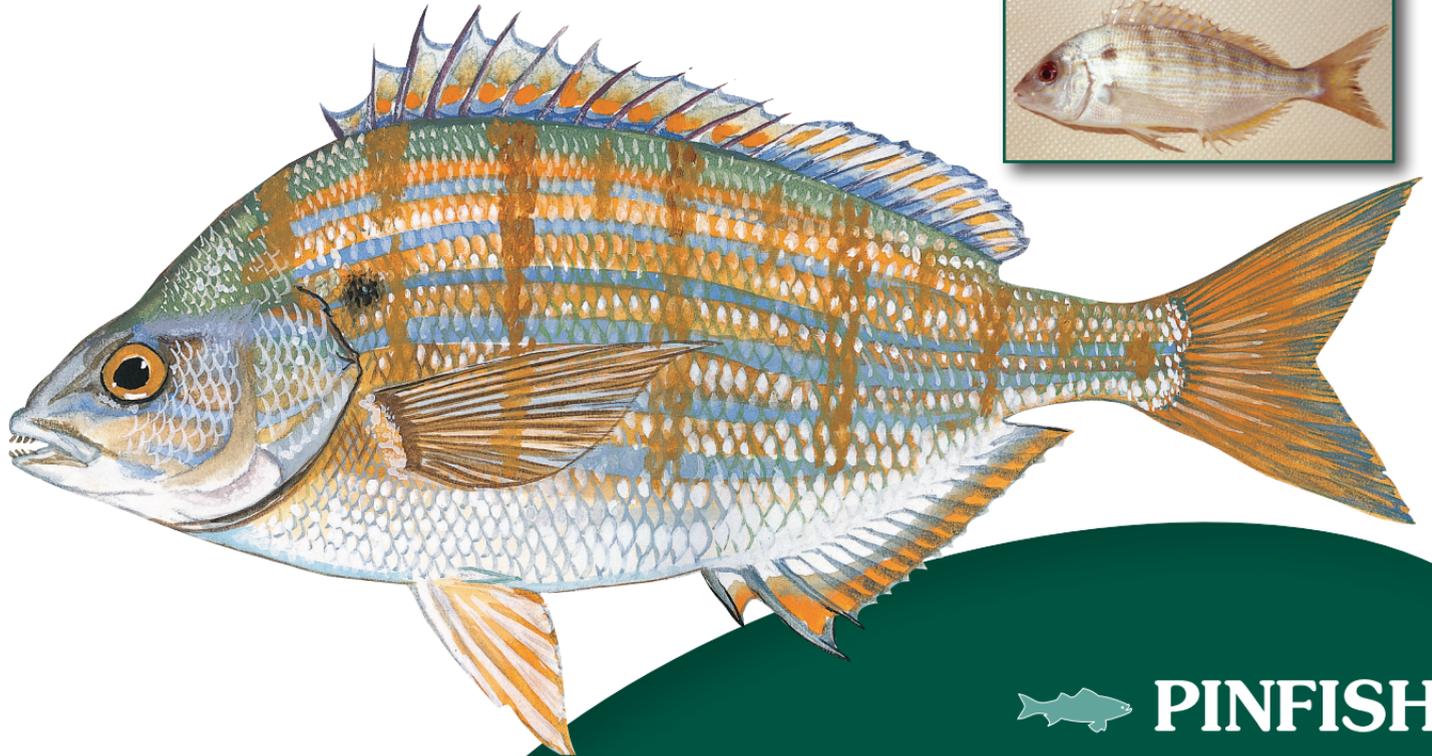


**PIGFISH**

*Orthopristis chryoptera*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Pigfish can be found in coastal waters over sand and mud bottoms. They are schooling fish and mostly nocturnal.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body color blue above, silvery below, each scale with a blue center and bronze edges, sides of head and back with yellow to orange-brown stripes and markings. Dorsal fin with 12 - 13 spines and 15 - 16 soft rays. Anal fin with three spines and 13 rays.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The white grunt has eight or nine anal rays and numerous longitudinal blue and yellow stripes on the head and anterior portion of body. The tomtate has nine anal rays and a dark brown or black spot at base of tail fin. The inside of the mouth of both fish is bright red.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 /2 pound, 6 - 8 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	2 pounds, 12 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Pigfish are bottom feeders that prefer to forage on crustaceans, worms, and small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs inshore in spring and early summer.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are mainly taken with light tackle using minnows, small jigs, grubs, and worms while fishing for other types of fish. Pigfish are frequently used as bait for other fish.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Fair. Due to their small size, pigfish are usually released or used for bait.

# PORGIES



**PINFISH**

*Lagodon rhomboides*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Pinfish are a coastal and inshore species that travel in schools, often over rocky bottoms and around docks and pilings. They may also enter brackish water or freshwater.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body silver, bluish-silver on sides with six dark, diffused vertical bars separated by yellow longitudinal stripes with a dark spot near the origin of the lateral line. Anal fin yellow with a broad, light blue margin. Posterior nostril oval-shaped. Eight broad, incisor-like teeth are present in both jaws, which are forward-directed and deeply notched.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Deeply notched incisor-like teeth coupled with the dark spot near the origin of the lateral line separate this species from other similar species.
<b>Average Size:</b>	¼ - ½ pound, 6-8 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	2 pounds, 10 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Pinfish feed on crustaceans, mollusks, worms, and occasionally small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	During the winter, pinfish move out of coastal waters into offshore waters to spawn.
<b>Angling:</b>	Known as bait stealers, these fish are generally not targeted by fishermen but are taken regularly and used for bait.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Fair. These fish are infrequently kept unless for bait because of their small size.
<b>Misc.:</b>	Pinfish are named for the small spines on their fins that stick fingers and hands just like pins or needles.

# PORGIES



**SHEEPSHEAD**

*Archosargus probatocephalus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Sheepshead frequent bays and estuaries and areas along the shoreline throughout the year. They commonly enter brackish water in coastal rivers and prefer obstructions such as pilings, piers, and rocks.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body nearly oval in shape, gray in color with five or six dark vertical bars and one on nape, no dark spot near origin of lateral line. Four broad, incisor-like teeth on each side of the jaw, their edges straight or only slightly notched, several molar-like teeth present. Dorsal fin has 12 spines and 11 soft rays, second anal spine very strong.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The black drum has 10 to 13 pairs of small barbels along the inner edges of the lower jaw, and the mouth is inferior and lacks molar-like teeth. Body scales are large.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 pound, 10-16 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	21 pounds, 24 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Sheepshead consume mollusks and crustaceans, often traveling in schools. They are browsing feeders that forage around pilings and may be located around jetties, over rocky bottoms, and in other places where they can find oysters and mussels.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Sheepshead spawn in early spring. Adults migrate to offshore waters to spawn. Females may produce 1,100 to 250,000 eggs per spawning event. The eggs are buoyant and hatch within 30 hours.
<b>Angling:</b>	Sheepshead are caught almost exclusively by still fishing with fiddler crabs, mussels, and shrimp around structures such as rock jetties, pilings, and reefs. These fish do not attack the bait but nibble and gently mouth it, requiring the angler to anticipate when to set the hook.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent.

# DRUMS



## ATLANTIC CROAKER



*Micropogonias undulatus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	The Atlantic croaker is a bottom dwelling, estuarine-dependent fish that becomes oceanic during spawning. They prefer mud, sand and shell bottoms, as well as areas around rocks, jetties, piers, and bridges.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body pinkish-silver, back and upper sides with pattern of vertical bars composed of irregular black spots. Chin with five pores and three to five pairs of small barbels along inner edges of lower jaw.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Black drum have 10 to 13 pairs of barbels on chin. Other similar species do not have barbels on chin or oblique dark streaks on back and sides.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 1 /2 pounds, 8 - 14 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	5 pounds, 24 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Adult croaker feed on detritus as well as larger invertebrates and fish. Sensory barbels allow the Atlantic croaker to find food on the bottom.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs at sea in winter and spring (November is the peak month) when croaker migrate to deeper, warmer waters.
<b>Angling:</b>	Atlantic croaker are caught by bottom fishing with live and cut baits fished on or near the bottom.
<b>Food quality:</b>	Excellent.
<b>Misc.:</b>	The common name “croaker” is derived from the deep croaking noises made when the fish contracts specialized muscles against its swim bladder. The resonant sound is amplified and can be heard from quite a distance.

# DRUMS



**BLACK DRUM**

*Pogonias cromis*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Black drum are inshore bottom fish. They favor sandy bottoms in salt or brackish waters near jetties, breakwaters, bridges, pier pilings, clam and oyster beds, channels, estuaries, bays, high marsh areas, and shorelines. They are common in all inshore and shallow coastal waters year-round, but are most abundant February through July.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Deep-bodied fish, silvery-gray in color. Young fish with four or five black vertical bars on sides that disappear with age. Body scales large and comblike, lateral line extending to hind margin of tail fin. Mouth inferior and nearly horizontal. Chin with 10 to 13 pairs of small barbels along inner edges of lower jaw.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Red drum have distinct, ocellated spots near tail fin and do not have barbels on chin. Atlantic croaker are smaller fish with dark, oblique streaks on upper sides and three to five pairs of chin barbels. Sheepshead have a nearly oval body, eight broad, incisor-like teeth, and no barbels on chin.
<b>Average Size:</b>	5 - 10 pounds, 14 - 24 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	113 pounds, 50 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Black drum feed on crustaceans and mollusks with a preference for blue crabs, shrimp, oysters, and squid. They locate food with their chin barbels and crush and grind shells with their teeth.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Adults school and migrate in the spring to bay and river mouths for the spawning season.
<b>Angling:</b>	Black drum frequently are caught by bottom fishing around natural, rocky outcroppings, artificial reefs, and other irregular bottoms with live and cut baits including crabs, clams, mussels, and shrimp.
<b>Food quality:</b>	Good. Smaller fish (less than 20 pounds) are of good quality. Larger fish may be coarse, and they frequently contain parasites.
<b>Misc.:</b>	This is the largest member of the drum family. Their drumming noise is voluntary and associated with locating and attracting mates.

# DRUMS



## SOUTHERN KINGFISH



*Menticirrhus americanus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Found year-round, but scarce during the winter months, kingfish are abundant in inlets and shallow coastal waters, and common along beaches.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Back and sides are silvery gray with seven or eight vertical, oblique, dark bars; belly white. Margins of fins dark, anal and tail fins often yellowish, anal fin with one spine. Mouth small and inferior with teeth in small broad bands in both jaws. Chin with a single, short, rigid barbel.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The gulf kingfish does not have dark sidebars. Other similar species do not have a chin barbel and have more than one anal fin spine.
<b>Average Size:</b>	½ - 1 pound, 6 - 10 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	3 pounds, 12 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Like other members of the drum family, the kingfish uses a chin barbel to probe the bottom for worms, crabs, and shrimp.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Southern kingfish spawn from April to August when the females scatter their eggs offshore.
<b>Angling:</b>	Southern kingfish are caught primarily surf fishing with live and cut baits including worms, shrimp, clams, fish.
<b>Food quality:</b>	Excellent. Southern kingfish are often pan-fried.
<b>Misc.:</b>	The southern kingfish is also known as whiting.

# DRUMS



**RED DRUM**

*Sciaenops ocellatus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Red drum are abundant in all inshore and shallow coastal waters year-round, but are most abundant in May through October. They can tolerate saltwater as well as freshwater and prefer sand and mud bottoms.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body iridescent silvery-gray with a copper cast, darker above. One or more ocellated spots present on upper sides from below soft portion of the dorsal fin to the base of the tail fin. Mouth inferior, nearly horizontal, teeth set in bands in both jaws.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Other croakers and drums do not have large black spots on tail or on upper sides.
<b>Average Size:</b>	2 - 5 pounds, 12 - 24 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	94 pounds, 60 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	This bottom fish uses its senses of sight and touch and its down-turned mouth to forage near the bottom. In shallow water, the red drum can often be seen browsing head-down with its tail slightly out of water (this is called "tailing"). In summer and fall, adults feed on crabs, shrimp, and small fish. During the spring, they feed on menhaden, mullet, pinfish, spot, Atlantic croaker, and flounder.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Red drum spawn in the fall. Shortly before spawning, males change color and become dark red or bright bluish gray above the lateral line. Hours before mating, both males and females chase and butt each other while drumming loudly.
<b>Angling:</b>	Young red drum (3 to 15 pounds) are taken by drift or still fishing on the bottom and by fly-fishing on flats. Favorite baits include shrimp, mud minnows, jigs, plugs, spoons, and streamer flies. Older and larger red drum are taken from the beach just past the breakers with live and cut baits.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. Fish less than 10 pounds are excellent. Larger fish may be coarse, of poor quality, and frequently contain parasites.
<b>Misc.:</b>	The red drum is also known as the redfish or channel bass.

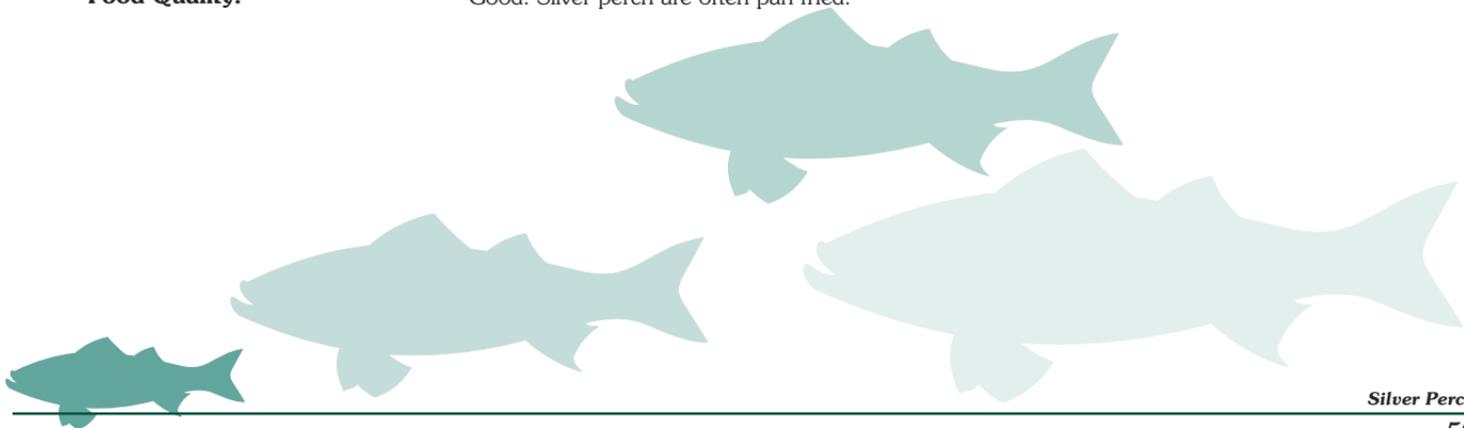
# DRUMS



## SILVER PERCH

*Bairdiella chrysoura*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Silver perch are inshore fish and are most common in bays, tidal creeks, small rivers, and inlets near estuaries.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body moderately deep and compressed. Back grayish-green in color fading to silver or white on sides and belly, faint, longitudinal, dotted lines present on sides. Anal and tail fins tinged in yellow. Mouth terminal. Preopercular with a few strong spines. Tail fin truncate.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Similar species either do not have a terminal mouth, or they lack spines on the preopercular margin. Seatrout have two large canine teeth in upper jaw. Atlantic croaker have barbels on chin.
<b>Average Size:</b>	Less than ½ pound, 6 - 8 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	1 pound, 12 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Silver perch favor crustaceans, worms, and small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs inshore during April and May.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are usually caught on or near the bottom while still fishing with live and cut natural baits such as fish, clams, shrimp, and worms.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Good. Silver perch are often pan-fried.



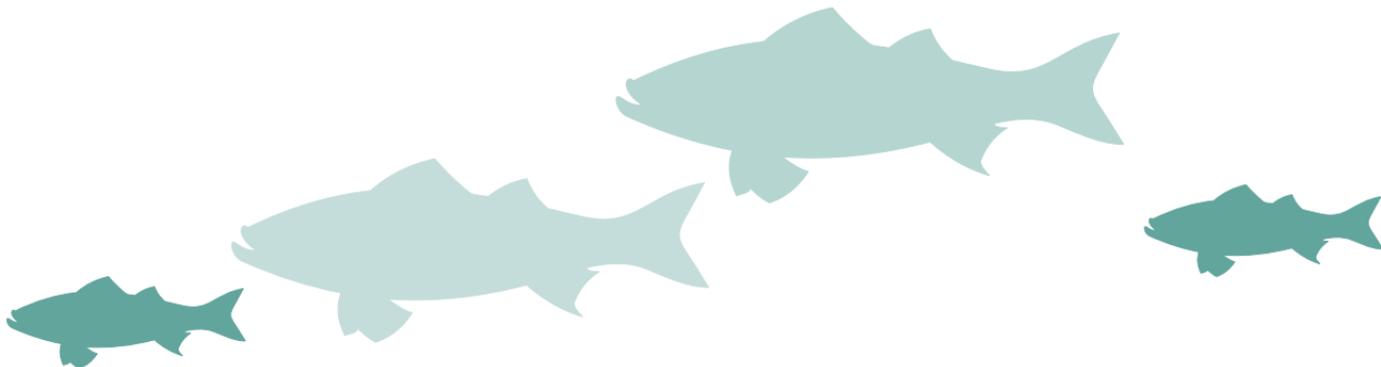
# DRUMS



**SPOT**

*Leiostomus xanthurus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Spot can be found in estuaries and coastal saltwater, generally roaming over sandy and muddy bottoms.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body silver with 12 to 15 oblique dark streaks extending to below lateral line. A dark blotch about the size of the eye located behind the upper end of the gill slit. Mouth small and inferior.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Body coloration and the lack of chin barbels make this fish easy to separate from similar species.
<b>Average Size:</b>	½ pound, 6 - 8 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	2 pounds, 10 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Spot feed on small crustaceans, detritus, worms, and small fish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spot spawn at sea in fall and winter.
<b>Angling:</b>	Spot are taken from coastal fishing piers particularly during the fall months when larger adults migrate from northern areas. These fish are often caught near the bottom with shrimp, clams, and cut bait.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. Spot are generally pan-fried.



# DRUMS



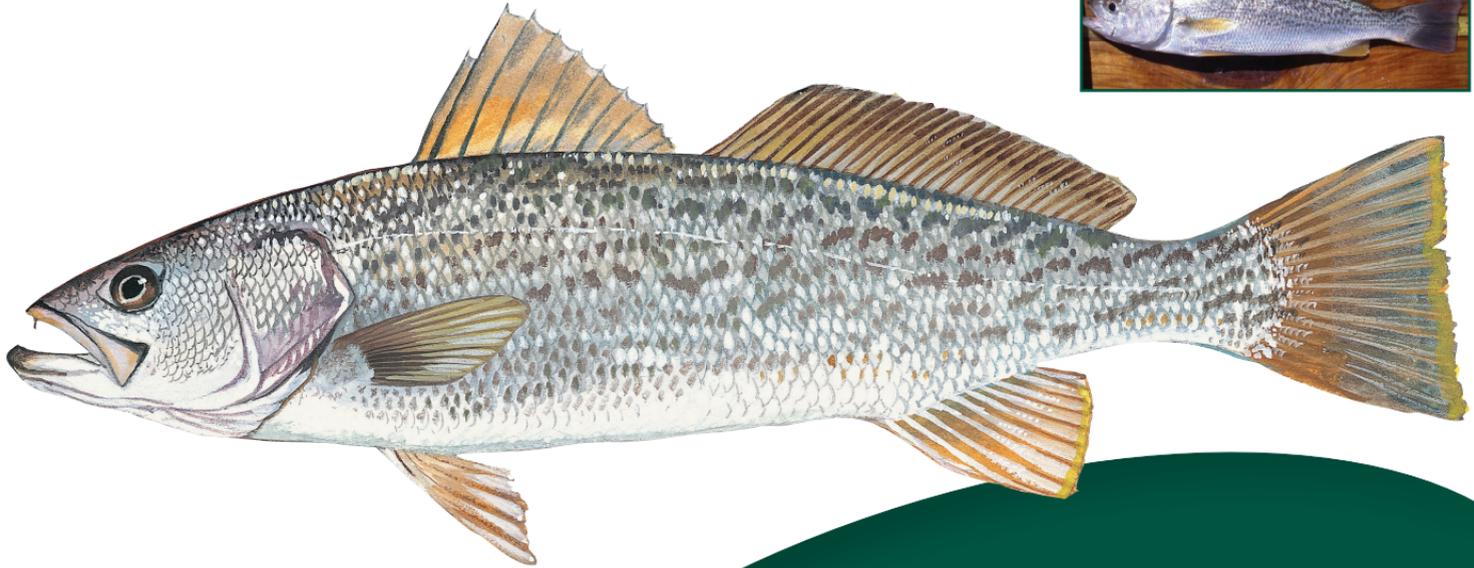
## SPOTTED SEATROUT



*Cynoscion nebulosus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Spotted seatrout are an inshore, bottom-dwelling species inhabiting shallow bays, estuaries, and rivers. They are most abundant in September through July.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Dark gray above with bluish reflections and numerous round black spots irregularly scattered on back and sides, also extending to soft part of dorsal and tail fins. Two large, canine-like teeth at tip of upper jaw, remaining teeth small, and those in lower jaw gradually increasing in size posteriorly. Chin without barbels or pores. Anterior dorsal fin with nine or 10 spines and second dorsal with one spine and 25 to 28 rays, soft portion of dorsal fin without scales.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The weakfish has small dark spots on back and sides that form faint, irregular, oblique streaks along the scale row. Up to one-third of the soft portion of the dorsal fin is covered with small scales. The banded drum has a shorter body with dark vertical bars. The mouth and up to one-third of the soft portion of the dorsal fin is covered with small scales. The mouth is strongly oblique, and second anal spine is strong.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 - 2 pounds, 12 - 20 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	15 pounds, 36 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Spotted seatrout are predatory, feeding primarily on shrimp and small fish, but also consuming mullet, menhaden, and silversides.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs at night in coastal bays, sounds, and estuaries and around barrier islands from May through August.
<b>Angling:</b>	Spotted seatrout are taken by trolling, jigging, surfcasting, and fly-fishing with both natural and artificial baits. Live shrimp is the best bait.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent.

# DRUMS



**WEAKFISH**

*Cynoscion regalis*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Weakfish prefer sandy bottoms. They are found in shallow waters along shores and in large bays and estuaries including salt marsh creeks and sometimes in river mouths.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body greenish above and silvery below, back and sides with many small, irregular, black spots forming oblique wavy streaks on sides. Fins yellow with the pelvic and anal fins brighter yellow. Mouth large and superior with two large, canine-like teeth at the tip of the upper jaw. No chin barbels or pores.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Spotted seatrout have dark spots on back and upper sides that are much larger and more distinct, and they do not form streaks. The fins are charcoal in color.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1 - 2 pounds, 10 - 15 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	18 pounds, 32 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Weakfish are omnivorous, feeding on crabs, shrimp, and other crustaceans, as well as mollusks and small fish such as herring and menhaden. Weakfish forage at different depths and levels and are able to adapt to local food conditions.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs near shore and in estuaries along the coast from May through October. The released eggs drift along the surface and hatch within two days.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are taken by casting, jigging, or still fishing with natural or artificial baits.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. The flesh is soft and has a tendency to spoil quickly.
<b>Misc.:</b>	Weakfish are so named because of the ease with which a hook tears from their mouths.

# SPADEFISH



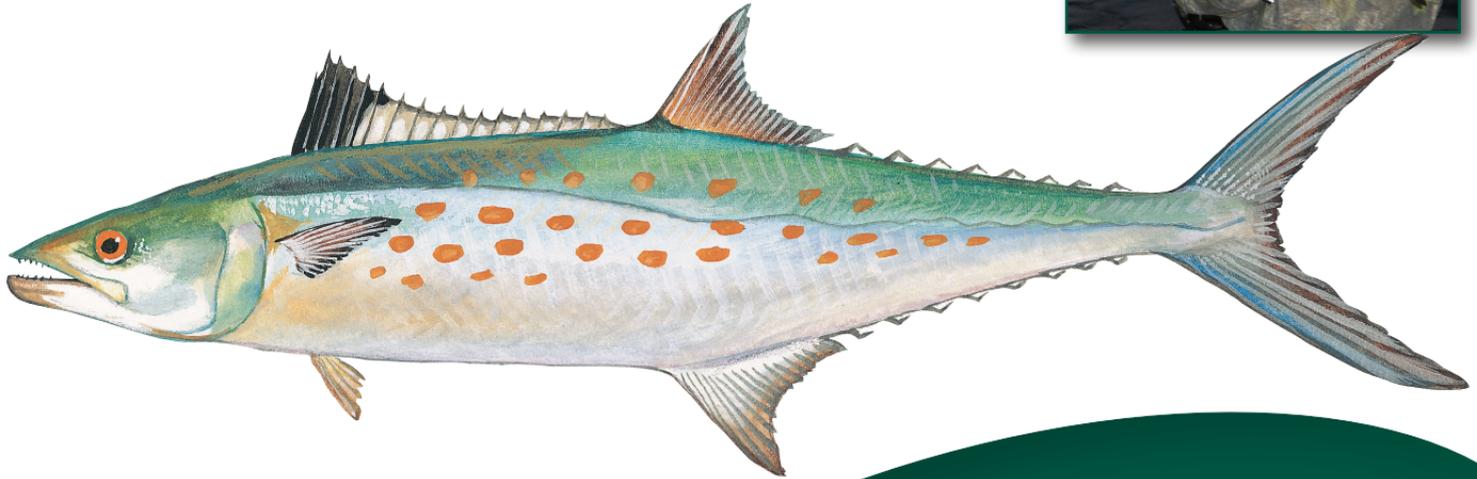
## ATLANTIC SPADEFISH



*Chaetodipterus faber*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Atlantic spadefish can be found from May through November in oceanic waters nearshore. They are abundant in shallow coastal waters, from sandy beaches to reefs and harbors, and are often found in large schools close to natural or man-made structures. Young Atlantic spadefish can be found swimming at an angle, even parallel to the surface, to disguise themselves as debris.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body almost as deep as long, body color varies from grayish to yellowish with four to six dark vertical bars. Mouth very small. Anal, tail and second dorsal fins pointed.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Black drum have body scales that are large. The mouth is inferior and nearly horizontal, and the chin has 10 to 13 pairs of small barbels along inner edges of lower jaw. Sheepshead have a nearly oval body shape that is gray in color with five or six dark, vertical bars. There are four broad, incisor-like teeth on each side of the jaw with their edges straight or only slightly notched. Several molar-like teeth are present.
<b>Average Size:</b>	6 pounds, 12 - 18 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	20 pounds, 36 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	The spadefish is a bottom feeder, preferring shellfish, crustaceans, worms, mollusks, and jellyfish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs in spring and summer.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are known for their strong fighting ability. They are often caught using a small gold hook baited with pieces of clam, shrimp, or cannon ball jellyfish.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. These fish have firm white flesh that has a delicate flavor.
<b>Misc.:</b>	Spadefish possess such strong schooling behavior that an entire school may follow a hooked fish.

# MACKERELS



## SPANISH MACKEREL



*Scomberomorus maculatus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Spanish mackerel are abundant in coastal waters from April through October. They prefer open water but are sometimes found over deep rocky areas and reefs as well as in shallow water estuaries. They form large, fast-moving schools that migrate great distances along the shore, staying in waters with temperatures above 68 °F.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Back bluish-green, sides silver with numerous yellow to bronze spots and no streaks, anterior portion of the first dorsal black. Lateral line gradually curving down toward caudal peduncle. Two scarcely separated dorsal fins, first dorsal fin with 17 to 19 spines.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	King mackerel have a lateral line that abruptly curves downward under second dorsal fin. The first dorsal fin has 14 to 16 spines and is uniformly dusky gray in color. Young king mackerel have yellowish-bronze spots similar to adult Spanish mackerel. Cero have spots and one or two longitudinal stripes on sides, and the pectoral fins are covered with scales. Wahoo have 24 to 26 spines in the first dorsal fin, a snout as long as rest of head, and numerous vertical stripes on the sides of its body.
<b>Average Size:</b>	2 - 3 pounds, 12 - 20 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	13 pounds, 24 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Spanish mackerel feed on small fish, shrimp, and squid.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spanish mackerel spawn offshore from April through September where females release between 500,000 and 1.5 million eggs.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are taken primarily by trolling and drift fishing with natural baits and artificial lures. They are regularly taken very close to shore from fishing piers.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent.

# FLOUNDERS



## SOUTHERN FLOUNDER

 *Paralichthys lethostigma*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Southern flounder are estuarine dependent bottom fish that commonly inhabit inshore channels, bay mouths, and estuaries year-round. They prefer sandy and live bottom areas around pilings, jetties, oyster bars, and in high current areas.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body olive-brown in color with diffuse dark spots and blotches, underside of body white. Both eyes located on upper side of body, space between eyes about as wide as eye diameter. Dorsal fin with 80 to 95 rays originating slightly in front of upper eye, pectoral fin with 11 to 13 rays, and anal fin with 63 to 74 rays.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Summer flounder have five prominent, ocellated, dark spots on body in a double triangular pattern.
<b>Average Size:</b>	2 - 3 pounds, 16 - 20 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	20 pounds, 36 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	The flounder will bury itself in the sand and wait to ambush prey. They feed on shrimp, crabs, and fish such as anchovies, mullet, menhaden, Atlantic croaker, and pinfish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Spawning occurs in offshore waters in late fall and early winter. Females typically release several hundred thousand eggs, which hatch and migrate into the estuaries and change from upright swimmers into left-eyed bottom-dwellers.
<b>Angling:</b>	These fish are taken while drift fishing or casting with natural baits such as mud minnows, strips of cut bait, and pieces of blue crab, or with artificial baits such as buck tails, small spoons, and spinners.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent. Southern flounder have white, firm flesh.
<b>Misc.:</b>	Southern flounder change their color to match different bottoms, allowing them to escape detection by predators and prey.

# FLOUNDERS

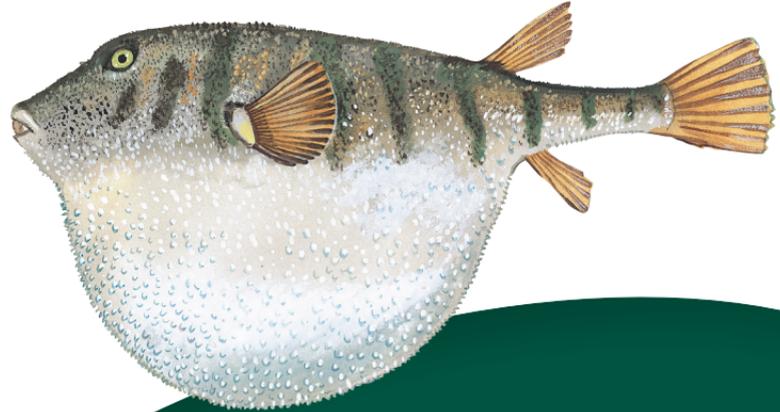
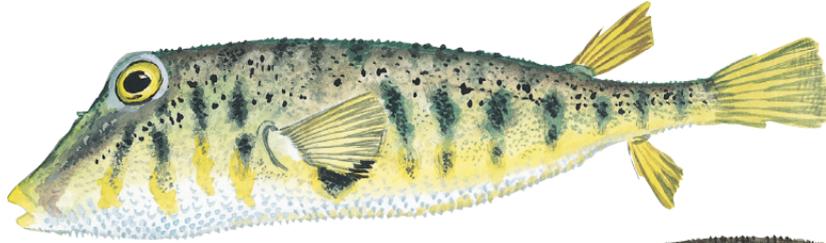


**SUMMER FLOUNDER**

*Paralichthys dentatus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	Summer flounder are found in inshore and offshore waters on or near the sea bottom burrowing in the sandy substrate.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Dorsoventrally flattened body with both eyes on left side of body; color varies with upper side assuming coloration of surrounding habitat. Five prominent ocellated spots on posterior portion of body forming two triangles. Dorsal fin originates at anterior portion of eye.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	The southern flounder has fewer gillrakers (10) compared the summer flounder (15). Southern flounder also lack the distinct ocellated spot pattern.
<b>Average Size:</b>	1.5 pounds, 14.7 inches.
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	SC State Record is 3 pounds, 8 ounces.
<b>Food Habits:</b>	Summer flounder lie in ambush and wait for their prey. They are quick and efficient predators with well-developed teeth allowing them to capture small fish, squid, sea worms, shrimp, and other crustaceans.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Summer flounder usually begin to spawn at age two or three, at lengths of about 10 inches. Spawning occurs in the fall while the fish are moving offshore. Spawning migration is linked to sexual maturity, with the oldest and largest fish migrating first. As in their seasonal migrations, spawning summer flounder in the northern portion of the geographic range spawn and move offshore (depths of 120 to 600 feet) earlier than those in the southern part of the range. Larvae migrate to inshore coastal and estuarine areas from October to May. The larvae, or fry, move to bottom waters upon reaching the coast and spend their first year in bays and other inshore areas. At the end of their first year, some juveniles join the adult offshore migration.
<b>Angling:</b>	Caught using similar methods to those used for southern flounder. Taken while drift fishing or casting with natural baits such as mud minnows, strips of cut bait, and pieces of blue crab, or with artificial baits such as jigs, bucktails and spinners.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent

# PUFFERS



## NORTHERN PUFFER



*Sphoeroides maculatus*

<b>Habitat:</b>	The northern puffer can be found in bays, estuaries, and protected coastal waters.
<b>Identifying Key Characteristics:</b>	Body gray to brown with black specks and a series of bar-like markings on the lower sides, covered with small spines. Capable of inflating body into round, ball shape. Head blunt. Mouth small with two teeth in the upper and lower jaws giving it a beak-like appearance.
<b>Distinguishing Characteristics of Similar Species:</b>	Other puffers in the region lack the black specks covering the body and exhibit different color patterns.
<b>Average Size:</b>	2 - 4 pounds, 8 - 10 inches
<b>Approximate Maximum Size:</b>	6 pounds, 12 inches
<b>Food Habits:</b>	The diet of the northern puffer consists mainly of shellfish.
<b>Spawning Habits:</b>	Puffer spawn close to shore during the summer.
<b>Angling:</b>	Northern puffers are not considered a sport fish but are frequently taken on natural baits fished on the bottom.
<b>Food Quality:</b>	Excellent but risky. Northern puffer are reputedly excellent but are not eaten frequently as the roe (eggs) and other organs are toxic. It is considered a delicacy in some countries.
<b>Misc.:</b>	The northern puffer is also known as the “sea squab.”

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# Angler Ethics

It is important as an angler to practice good fishing ethics in order to protect the resource and help improve everyone's fishing experience.

## **Do your part to be a responsible sportsman by following these principles:**

- Respect the law. Obey all fishing regulations and report violators by calling 1-800-922-5431.
- Respect the resource. Keep only those fish that are injured or those you intend to eat.
- Practice catch and release fishing.
- Respect the rights of landowners. Get permission to fish on their property first.
- Respect other anglers' territory or space. Treat them the way you would like to be treated.
- Respect the land. Leave no litter and take out what you take in. Leave your fishing area cleaner than you found it.
- Pass it on. Teach a child or a friend to fish.
- Support fisheries research and habitat protection.
- Join an organization that works to protect the resource and promotes responsible sportsmen conduct.

## **Safety**

- Keep at least one rod's length between you and the next angler before, during and after you cast.
- Always look behind you and to the side before casting to prevent hooking power lines, trees, or a person.
- Wear sunglasses, sunscreen, bug spray and other protection from the natural elements.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and be on the alert for ant mounds and snakes. Avoid thick grassy areas where you can't see your feet.
- Be very careful around water and make sure you have a fishing buddy with you. If fishing from a boat or bank near deep water, always wear a life jacket or PFD (personal flotation device).

Currently, many fish species of popular game fish have legally mandated size and catch limits, requiring anglers to release undersized and over the limit fish. Many anglers voluntarily release their fish. If these fish are not released properly, their chance of survival is reduced.

Whether anglers choose to release fish or are required to do so by law, all released fish should be handled carefully to give the fish the best chance for survival.

When practicing catch and release fishing, you should do the following:

- Use barbless or circle hooks and needlenose pliers or forceps to reduce injury and handling time of the fish.
- Land the fish as quickly as possible to minimize the fish's fighting time.
- Use wet hands when handling a fish and minimize the fish's time out of the water.
- Never hold a fish by the gills.
- When returning a fish to the water, point the fish into the current or cradle it in your hands loosely under the water until the fish swims away on its own.
- If a fish is landed and the hook has been swallowed, cut the line as far down in the fish's mouth as possible. Do NOT pull the hook out!

## Catch & Keep

Most of the game fish species are excellent fare for the frying pan or grill. If fishing to keep, make sure you follow all rules and regulations with regards to size and catch limits. Keep only fish you will use and release the rest. Plan ahead and bring a proper storage container to put the fish on ice or in water. Get fish cleaned as soon as possible and enjoy! Bon appetite!



## Acknowledgements

Some of the species' descriptions appearing in this guide have been taken from the AFO Species Identification Sheets for Fisheries Purposes, edited by W. Fisher (1978), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Introductory materials have been taken from various South Carolina DNR publications. Color plates have been reproduced with permission of Mr. Duane Raver, Jr. Common names presented in this guide are those accepted by the American Fisheries Society, Common and Scientific Names of Fishes of the United States and Canada, Special Publication 20, fifth edition. Gratitude is expressed to Mrs. BeBe Harrison, Ms. Ginger DeHaven, Dr. Wendy Moore Brusca, Dr. Jack McGovern, Mr. Robert Wiggers, Mr. Don Hammond, Dr. Mark Collins, Dr. Charles Wenner, Dr. Charles Barans, Mr. David Whitaker, Mr. David Cupka, and Ms. Lesleigh Patton for reviewing the manuscript and offering many helpful suggestions. Photo credits: Photographs were provided by SCDNR staff including Mr. Scott Meister, Mr. Tim Snoots, Mr. Pearse Webster, Mr. Robert Wiggers, and Mr. Randy Gregory of NCDMF.

