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FISH SPECIES

Red Snapper



Family Lutjanidae, SNAPPERS

Lutjanus campechanus

Description: color pinkish red over entire body, whitish below; long triangular snout; anal fin sharply pointed; no dark lateral spot.

Similar Fish: vermilion snapper, *R. aurorubens*.

Where found: OFFSHORE on the continental shelf, oil and gas rigs.

Size: to 20 pounds.

Remarks: juveniles occur over sandy or mud bottoms and are often taken in shrimp trawls; adults may live more than 20 years, and attain 35 pounds or more; sexual maturity attained at age 2; spawns June to October; feeds on crustaceans and fish.

Crevalle Jack



Family Carangidae, JACKS and POMPANOS

Caranx hippos

Description: color bluish-green to greenish-gold black and silver of yellowish belly; soft dorsal and anal fins almost identical in size; prominent black spot on operculum (gill cover); black spot at the base of each pectoral fin; no scales on throat.

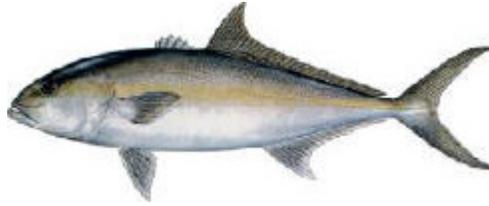
Similar Fish: other *Caranx*.

Where found: common in both inshore waters and the open sea.

Size: usually 3 to 5 pounds. **Remarks:** tolerates a wide range of salinities; schools corner a school of baitfish at the surface and feed with commotion that can be seen at great distances; feeds mainly on small fish; peak spawning occurs Offshore from March through September.

[Top](#)

Greater Amberjack



Family Carangidae, JACKS and POMPANOS *Seriola dumerili*

Description: dark stripe (variably present) extends from nose to in front of dorsal fin and "lights up" when fish is in feeding mode; no scutes; soft dorsal base less than twice the length of the anal fin base.

Similar Fish: other *Seriola*.

Where found: Offshore species associated with rocky reefs, debris, and wrecks, typically in 60 - 240 feet of water; juveniles associated with floating objects and may occur in water less than 30 feet deep.

Size: common to 40 pounds. **Remarks:** largest of the jacks; though.

Sheepshead



Family Sparidae, PORGIES *Archosargus probatocephalus*

Description: basic silvery color; with 5 or 6 distinct vertical black bands on sides, not always the same on both sides; prominent teeth, including incisors, molars, and rounded grinders; no barbels on lower jaw; strong and sharp spines on dorsal and anal fins.

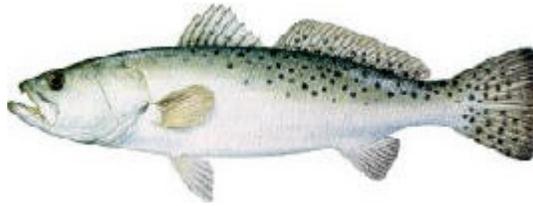
Similar Fish: black drum, *Pogonias cromis*; Atlantic spadefish, *Chaetodipterus* (black drum have barbels on lower jaw, sheepshead do not; vertical barring on sides of black drum and spadefish disappear as fish mature; spadefish have small, brush-like teeth).

Where found: INSHORE species around oyster bars, seawalls and in tidal creeks; moves nearshore in late winter and early spring for spawning, gathering over debris, artificial reefs and around navigation markers.

Size: Inshore, 1 to 2 pounds; offshore, common to 8 pounds.

Remarks: feeds on mollusks and crustaceans such as fiddler crabs and barnacles; famed nibblers, prompting the saying that "anglers must strike just before they bite."

Spotted Seatrout



Family Sciaenidae, DRUMS

Cynoscion nebulosus

Description: dark gray or green above, with sky blue tinges shading to silvery and white below; numerous distinct round black spots on back, extending to the dorsal fins and tail; black margin on posterior of tail; no barbels; no scales on the soft dorsal fin; one or two prominent canine teeth usually present at tip of upper jaw.

Similar Fish: other Speckled Trout

Where found: Inshore and/or nearshore over grass, sand and sandy bottoms; move into slow-moving or still, deep waters in cold weather.

Size: common to 4 pounds on west coast, larger on east coast.

Description: dark gray or green above, with sky blue tinges shading to silvery and white below; numerous distinct round black spots on back, extending to the dorsal fins and tail; black margin on posterior of tail; no barbels; no scales on the soft dorsal fin; one or two prominent canine teeth usually present at tip of upper jaw.

Similar Fish: other Speckled Trout

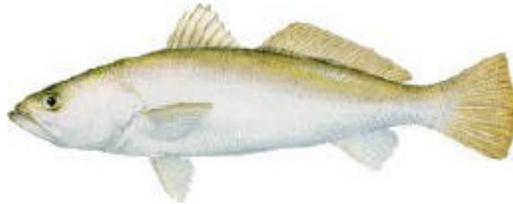
Where found: Inshore and/or near shore over grass, sand and sandy bottoms; move into slow-moving or still, deep waters in cold weather.

Size: common to 4 pounds on west coast, larger on east coast.

Remark association with seagrass beds; lives mainly in estuaries and moves only short distances; adults feed mainly on shrimp and small fish; prefers water temperatures between 58 and 81 degrees F and may be killed if trapped in shallow water during cold weather; longevity 8 to 10 years.

[Top](#)

Sand Seatrout



Family Sciaenidae, DRUMS
Cynoscion arenarius

Description: pale body color, yellow above, silver to white below; one or two prominent canine teeth usually at tip of upper jaw; inside of mouth yellow; no well-defined black spots on back; 10 to 12 soft rays in anal fin; no chin barbels.

Similar Fish: White trout, Sand Trout

Where found: a Gulf species that may occur in the Atlantic waters of extreme south-eastern Florida; adults predominantly found inshore residing in bays and inlets but may move offshore during winter months; young occur inshore in shallow bays.

Size: usually less than 1 pound (10 to 12 inches).

Remarks: matures during first or second year; prolonged inshore spawning season extends through spring and summer; feeds mainly on small fish and shrimp.

[Top](#)

Red Drum



Family Sciaenidae, DRUMS
Sciaenops ocellatus

Description: chin without barbels; copper bronze body, lighter shade in clear waters; one to many spots at base of tail (rarely no spots); mouth horizontal and opening downward; scales large.

Other Names: Redfish, Rat Reds (undersized), Bull Reds (oversized), Drum

Similar Fish: black drum, *Pogonias cromis*.

Where found: juveniles are an INSHORE fish, migrating out of the estuaries at about 30 inches (4 years) and joining the spawning population OFFSHORE.

Size: one of 27 inches weighs about 8 pounds.

Remarks: red drum are an INSHORE species until they attain roughly 30 inches (4 years), then they migrate to join the NEARSHORE population; spawning occurs from August to November in NEARSHORE waters;

sudden cold snaps may kill red drum in shallow, INSHORE waters; feeds on crustaceans, fish and mollusks; longevity to 20 years or more.

[Top](#)

Black Drum



Family Sciaenidae, DRUMS
Pogonias cromis

Description: high arched back; 10 to 14 pairs of chin barbels; gray or black colored body in adults; young have 4 to 6 vertical bars; has cobblestone-like teeth capable of crushing oysters; scales large.

Other Names: Drum, Striped Drum

Similar Fish: the vertical bars on juvenile black drum are somewhat similar to those on sheepshead, *Archosargus probatocephalus*; spadefish, *Chaetodipterus faber*; red drum, *Sciaenops ocellatus*.

Where found: INSHORE fish common to bays and lagoons; bottom dweller often found around oyster beds; also OFFSHORE.

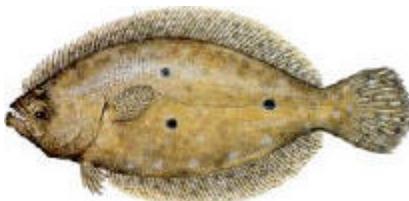
Size: common to 30 pounds.

***Florida Record:** 93 lbs.

Remarks: largest member of the drum family; spawns NEARSHORE in winter and early spring; feeds on oysters, mussels, crabs, shrimp and occasionally fish; longevity to 35 or more years.

[Top](#)

Gulf Flounder



Family Bothidae, LEFT EYE FLOUNDERS
Paralichthys albigutta

Description: body color brown, its shade depending on color of bottom, with numerous spots and blotches; 3 prominent eye-like spots forming a triangle; one spot on lateral line, one above, one below; numerous white spots scattered over body and fins (albigutta, white-spotted); strong canine-like teeth; caudal fin in shape of wedge, its tip in the middle.

Other Names: Flat Fish, Flounder

Similar Fish: southern flounder, *P. lethostigma* (no eye-like spots; color pattern is key to distinguishing the two species).

Where found: INSHORE on sandy or mud bottoms, often ranging into tidal creeks; occasionally caught on NEARSHORE rocky reefs.

Size: common to 2 pounds, generally smaller than southern flounder.

Remarks: hatches into usual fish form, but right eye migrates over to left side early in life; a bottom dweller; thought to spawn OFFSHORE; feeds on crustaceans and small fishes.

[Top](#)

Bluefish



Family Pomatomidae, BLUEFISHES
Pomatomus saltatrix

Description: color blue or greenish blue on back, sides silvery; mouth large; teeth prominent, sharp, and compressed; dorsal and anal fins nearly the same size; scales small; lateral line almost straight.

Other Names: Blue, Chopper, Anchoa

Similar Fish: blue runner, *C. crysos*.

Where found: young usually INSHORE spring and summer, moving OFFSHORE to join adults fall and winter; strong migration of northeast Atlantic stock to Florida east coast in winter.

Size: most west coast catches under 3 pounds, much larger on east coast.

Remarks: travels in large schools, following schools of baitfish; cannibalistic; all members of a given school about the same size; spawning occurs OFFSHORE in spring and summer.

[Top](#)

Cobia



Family Rachycentridae, COBIA
Rachycentron canadum

Description: long, slim fish with broad depressed head; lower jaw projects past upper jaw; dark lateral stripe extends through eye to tail; first dorsal fin comprised of 7 to 9 free spines; when young, has conspicuous alternating black and white horizontal stripes.

Other Names: Ling, Crab Eater, Lemonfish, Bacalao

Similar Fish: remora, *Echeneis naucrates*.

Where found: both INSHORE and NEARSHORE inhabiting inlets, bays, and among mangroves; frequently seen around bouys, pilings, and wrecks.

Size: common to 30 pounds.

Remarks: spawns in spring and early summer; feeds on crabs, squid, and small fish.

[Top](#)

Tarpon



Family Elopidae, TARPONS
Megalops atlanticus

Description: last ray of dorsal fin extended into long filament; one dorsal fin; back dark blue to green or greenish black, shading into bright silver on the sides; may be brownish gold in estuarine waters; huge scales; mouth large and points upward.

Other Names: Silver King, Sabalo

Similar Fish: (as juveniles) ladyfish, *Elops saurus*.

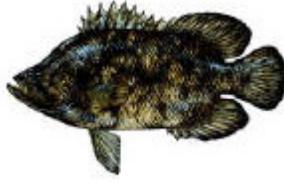
Where found: primarily INSHORE fish, although adult fish spawn OFFSHORE where the ribbon-like larval stage of the fish can be found.

Size: most angler catches 40 to 50 pounds.

Remarks: slow grower; matures at 7 to 13 years of age; spawning occurs between May and September; female may lay more than 12 million eggs; can tolerate wide range of salinity; juveniles commonly found in fresh water; can breathe air at surface; feeds mainly on fish and large crustaceans.

[Top](#)

Tripletail



Lobotes surinamensis

Other Names: Drift Fish, Leaf Fish, Black Fish

Habitat: The Tripletail is a true world traveler, drifting with ocean currents and often spotted by dolphin fishermen in weedlines or alongside floating debris. Many are found closer to shore in most coastal areas during warm months, and also in larger bays usually hanging around markers or trap floats.

Description: Deep, somewhat rounded shape gives it the appearance of an oversize panfish. Color varies but is usually brownish and mottled. Head is concave above the mouth. Name derives from similarity and near juxtaposition of the dorsal, caudal and anal fins, resembling three tails.

Size: Most run 2-12 pounds; but rare catches reach 30 or more. World record 42 pounds, 5 ounces.

Food Value: One of the best.

Game Qualities: Despite its clumsy looks, the Tripletail is a good gamefish in all respects. It willingly strikes artificial lures and its fight is characterized by short, frantic runs and startling jumps. Big ones in deep water are also good at bulldogging. Like Cobia with which they frequently share the shade of a navigation structure Tripletail are adept at fouling lines.

Baits: Live shrimp and small fish. Strip baits and dead shrimp. Plastic and bucktail jigs, mirror lures.

Type of Fishing: Casting; Drifting; Still Fishing.

[Top](#)

Ladyfish



Family Elopidae, TARPONS
Elops saurus

Description: terminal mouth, slender body, small scales; last dorsal ray not elongated; head small and pointed.

Other Names: Ten-Pounder, Skipjack, Chiro

Similar Fish: juvenile tarpon, *Megalops atlanticus*.

Where found: INSHORE fish, in bays and estuaries; occasionally enters freshwater, occurring in tidal pools and canals; often forms large schools and harasses bait at the surface.

Size: 2 to 3 pounds.

Remarks: known to spawn OFFSHORE, ribbon-like larvae very similar to *Albula* and *Megalops*, peaking in

fall; adult feeds predominantly on fish and crustaceans; leaps when hooked.

[Top](#)

Vermilion Snapper



Family Lutjanidae, SNAPPERS
Rhomboplites aurorubens

Description: color of entire body reddish, with a series of short, irregular lines on its sides, diagonal blue lines formed by spots on the scales above the lateral line; sometimes with yellow streaks below the lateral line; large canine teeth absent; orientation of mouth and eye give it the appearance of looking upward; no dark lateral spot.

Other Names: Beeliner, Mingo, Cajon

Similar Fish: red snapper, *L. campechanus* (anal fin of red snapper has midpoint like a triangle).

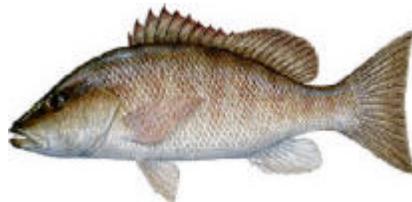
Where found: suspends at mid-depths over rocky reefs OFFSHORE.

Size: usually less than 1 pound.

Remarks: spawns April to September, females maturing at 3 to 4 years of age; grows slowly; attains weight of 6 pounds and length of 24 inches; feeds on small, swimming crustaceans and mollusks.

[Top](#)

Gray Snapper



Family Lutjanidae, SNAPPERS
Lutjanus griseus

Description: color dark brown or gray with reddish or orange spots in rows along the sides; dark horizontal band from snout through eye (young only); two conspicuous canine teeth at front of upper jaw; dorsal fins have dark or reddish borders; no dark spot on side underneath dorsal fin.

Other Names: Mangrove Snapper, Black Snapper, Mango, Caballerote

Similar Fish: cubera snapper, *L. cyanopterus*.

Where found: juveniles INSHORE in tidal creeks, mangroves, and grass beds; adults generally NEARSHORE

or OFFSHORE on coral or rocky reefs.

Size: offshore catches common 8 to 10 pounds.

Remarks: spawns June through August; feeds on crustaceans and small fish.

[Top](#)

King Mackerel



Family Scombridae, MACKERELS and TUNAS
Scomberomorus cavalla

Description: color of back iridescent bluish green; sides silvery, streamlined body with tapered head; no black pigment on front of dorsal fin; lateral line starts high and drops sharply below the second dorsal fin; young fish often have yellow spots like those of the Spanish mackerel.

Other Names: Kingfish, Sierra, Cavalla

Similar Fish: cero, *S. regalis*; Spanish mackerel, *S. maculatus*.

Where found: NEARSHORE and OFFSHORE, occasionally taken from piers running into deep water.

Size: common to 20 pounds.

Remarks: schooling fish that migrates from south Florida waters in winter to more northerly waters in spring; Gulf population thought to be separate from Atlantic population, with considerable mixing in winter from Cape Canaveral past Key West; spawns in midsummer OFFSHORE; feeds on small fish and squid.

[Top](#)

Spanish Mackerel



Family Scombridae, MACKERELS and TUNAS
Scomberomorus maculatus

Description: color of back green, shading to silver on sides, golden yellow irregular spots above and below lateral line; front of dorsal fin black; lateral line curves gently to base of tail.

Other Names: Sierra

Similar Fish: cero, *S. regalis*; king mackerel, *S. cavalla*.

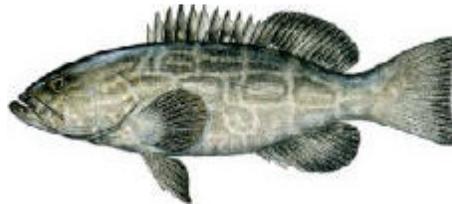
Where found: INSHORE, NEARSHORE and OFFSHORE, especially over grass beds and reefs; absent from north Florida waters in winter.

Size: average catch less than 2 pounds (20 inches).

Remarks: schooling fish that migrates northward in spring, returning to southerly waters when water temperature drops below 70 degrees F; spawns OFFSHORE, spring through summer; feeds on small fish and squid.

[Top](#)

Black Grouper



Family Serranidae, SEA BASSES AND GROUPEr *Mycteroperca bonaci*

Description: olive or gray body coloration with black blotches and brassy spots; gently rounded preopercle.

Other Names: Bonaci Arara Aguaji

Similar Fish: gag *M. microlepis*; yellowfin grouper, *M. venenosa*.

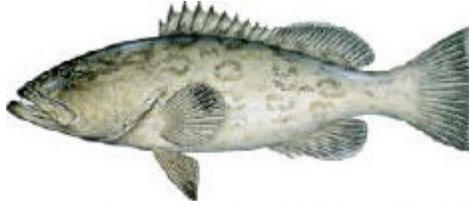
Where found: OFFSHORE species; adults associated with rocky bottoms, reef, and drop off walls in water over 60 feet deep; young may occur INSHORE in shallow water.

Size: common to 40 pounds, may attain weights exceeding 100 pounds.

Remarks: spawns between May and August; protogynous hermaphrodites, young predominantly female, transforming into males as they grow larger; larger individuals generally in greater depths; feeds on fish and squid.

[Top](#)

Gag



Family Serranidae, SEA BASSES AND GROUPEL

Mycteroperca microlepis

Description: brownish gray in color with dark worm-like markings on sides; strong serrated spur at bottom margin of preopercle, less noticeable in large specimens; fins dark, with anal and caudal having white margin. Often confused with black grouper; tail of gag is slightly concave, black is square; gag has white margin on anal and caudal fins, black does not; under 10 pounds, gag's spur on preopercle is distinctive, where black is gently rounded.

Other Names: Gray Grouper, Grass Grouper, Copper Belly, Black Grouper

Similar Fish: black grouper *M. bonaci*.

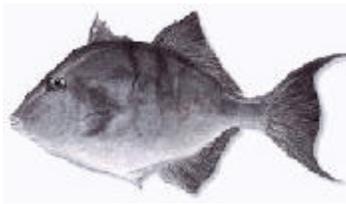
Where found: adults OFFSHORE over rocks and reefs; juveniles occur in seagrass beds INSHORE.

Size: common to 25 pounds.

Remarks: forms spawning aggregations in water no shallower than 120 feet in Middle Grounds area, January through March; current research to identify similar aggregations off Atlantic coast is ongoing. Young gags are predominantly female, transforming into males as they grow larger; feeds on fish and squid.

[Top](#)

GRAY TRIGGERFISH



Family Serranidae, *Blistes capriscus*

Other Names: Common, Triggerfish, Common Turbot, Cucuyo

Habitat: Mostly found well offshore.

Description: Uniform dark gray in color, sometimes with darker blotches on the sides, especially in smaller fish.

Size: Averages 1-3 pounds. World record 13 pounds, 9 ounces.

Food Value: Excellent. Many consider Triggerfish fillets to be tasty. They are, however, more difficult to clean because of their tough skins.

Game Qualities: The small mouth of the Triggerfish makes them difficult to hook, but once they are on a line they put up an outstanding fight against light tackle.

Baits: Shrimp and any cut bait. Plastic lures.

Type of Fishing: Drifting; Still Fishing.

[Top](#)

Atlantic Spadefish



Family Ehippidae, SPADEFISHES

Chaetodipterus faber

Description: silvery with 4 to 6 black vertical bands on each side which sometimes become obscure in larger fish; deep, flattened body; separated first and second dorsal fins; concave caudal fin; anterior rays of second dorsal fin and anal fin elongated.

Other Names: Striped Angelfish, Chrivita Chiva

Similar Fish: no close resemblances, but frequently and mistakenly called angelfish.

Where found: INSHORE and NEARSHORE, around natural and artificial reefs, and especially near navigation markers in 15 to 20 feet of water.

Size: most catches less than 2 pounds, known to reach 15 pounds.

Remarks: spawns in spring and summer; travels in large schools; small juveniles almost totally black, known to drift on their sides and mimic floating debris; feeds on crustaceans, small encrusting invertebrates, and may nibble on tentacles of jellyfish.

[Top](#)

Blacktip Shark



(*Carcharhinus limbatus*)

Other Names: Small Blacktip

Habitat: Occurs from the open sea to the coast.

Description: Gray above, white below. Tips of dorsal and pectoral fins are black, as is the lower lobe of the caudal fin. Short snout and stout body. Dorsal fin begins at a point above the rear portion of the pectoral fin.

Size: Common from 5-30 pounds; seldom reaches 100 pounds, but reported to 200 or more. World record 270 pounds, 9 ounces.

Food Value: Very good.

Game Qualities: Pound for pound, probably the scrappiest of sharks. Wages a wild battle on light tackle, marked by long runs and frantic jumps, especially in shallow water.

Baits: Shrimp and any sort of cut bait.

Type of Fishing: Casting; Drifting; Still Fishing.