

Identification Guide

What Is It?

Learning to identify fish is a fascinating study in itself and is important to anglers. Misidentification can lead to fisheries violations. Fish and invertebrates commonly caught by anglers in Florida are included in the following listing.

How to Use This Section

The foundation of learning fish identification is to become familiar with anatomical features that are shared by most species. The following diagrams show several aspects of fish anatomy and can help you identify a fish by focusing on distinguishing characteristics. A glossary of fish anatomy terms is also provided so you'll know what features to focus on when identifying a fish.

Provided for each species listed in this guide:

Description: The details most easily observed have been given top priority, since the angler has only moments to decide if a fish is a legal catch.

Similar Species: Many fish have “look-alikes,” other fish that resemble them closely; in such instances, the most readily seen differences are given.

Habitat: Many fish are associated with particular habitats; this information can help anglers know where to drop the hook.

Size: Anglers usually judge the size of the fish by its weight; scientists use length, since age/length relationships are more reliable than age/weight.

Notes: This includes the fish's life history, behavior, and feeding habits.

It is the angler's responsibility to know current fishing regulations, including bag limits, size limits and closed seasons. To stay updated on fishing regulations, visit MyFWC.com/Fishing.

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Glossary of Terms

Snout – Portion of the head in front of the eyes and above the mouth

Maxilla – Upper jaw

Mandible – Lower jaw

Vomerine Tooth Patch – Found on the roof of the mouth in snappers and other fishes

Barbel – Fleshy sensory projection on the head; usually near the mouth, chin or snout

Preopercle – Bone between cheek and gill cover

Interopercle – Bone between preopercle and operculum (gill cover)

Operculum (gill cover) – Bony flap that protects the gills; opens and closes at the rear during respiration

Gill Rakers – Structures that project forward from the gill arches, like the teeth of a comb

Nape – Upper surface of body behind the head and before the dorsal fin

Bar – A short, straight color mark, oriented vertically unless otherwise stated

Stripe – A straight color mark, usually oriented horizontally

Ray – One of the supporting elements in a fin; may be soft or spiny

Spinous Fin Rays – Sharp bony spines that support a fin

Soft Fin Rays – Jointed soft rods that support a fin

Dorsal Fin – Fin located on the back; may be separated into first dorsal fin and second dorsal fin

Spinous Dorsal Fin – Fin supported by bony spines, usually in front

Soft Dorsal Fin – Fin supported by soft rays, usually in back

Adipose Fin – A small fleshy fin that lacks fin rays

Pectoral Fins – Pair of fins generally located in the shoulder region of the fish

Pelvic Fins – Pair of fins located below or behind the pectoral fins; placement of these fins varies between species

Anal Fin – Unpaired fin on underside, behind the anus and just before the tail

Finlets – Small fins positioned behind the dorsal and anal fins

Caudal Peduncle – Slender area where the body attaches to the tail

Keel – Horizontal ridge on the caudal peduncle that provides stability

Caudal Fin – Tail fin; portion of the body behind the anus

Lateral Line – Line on side of body filled with sensory organs that detect pressure changes

Ocellus – An eyespot in which the central color is bordered by a ring of another color, which is also different from the adjacent body color or fin

Scutes – Bone-like projections

Carapace – Bony or horned covering encasing the body

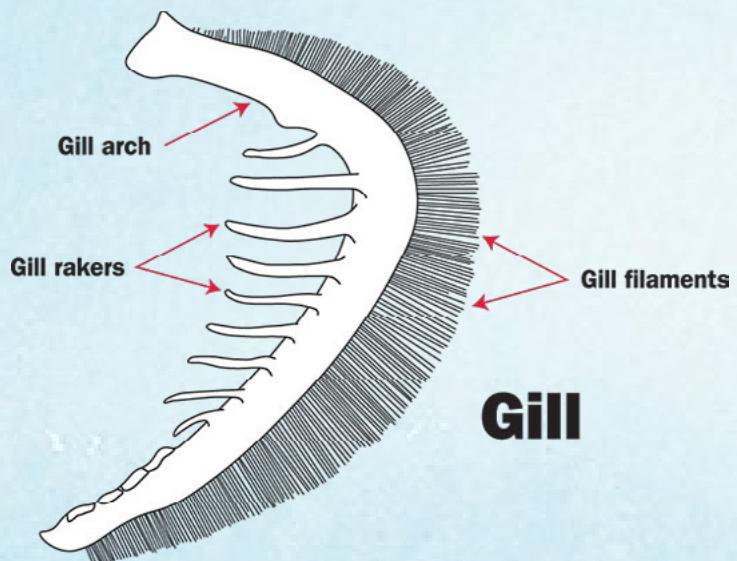
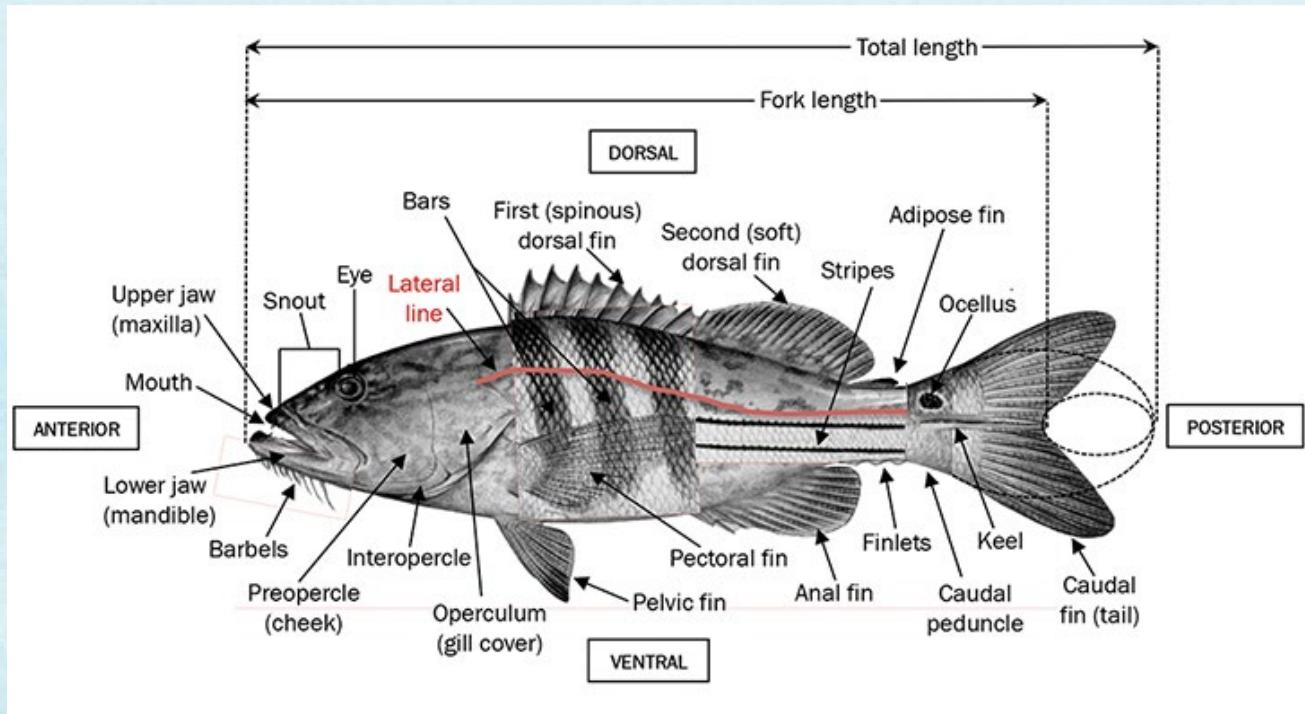
Snout Length – Measured from tip of snout to front of eye

Fork Length – Measured from tip of snout to tail fork

Total Length – Measured from tip of snout to tip of pinched tail

Fish Anatomy

These diagrams show important anatomical characteristics of fishes.



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Identification Guide

Mollusks

Bay Scallops

Argopecten irradians

Family Pectinidae, Scallops

Description:

- Mottled gray and black bivalve with two shells
- Lower shell is white
- Have one adductor muscle, often sought after for food
- Rows of blue eyespots along edge of mantle

Similar Species: Calico scallops, *A. gibbus* (have a patchwork of red and pink color on the upper shell)

Habitat: Seagrass meadows in shallow waters

Size: Up to 3 inches

Notes: Capable of swimming by clapping valves together; rarely live longer than one year

Oysters

Crassostrea virginica

Family Ostreidae, True Oysters

Description:

- Oval shaped bivalve with two bumpy, wrinkled shells
- Inside of shell is white with a purple muscle scar
- Feed by filtering food from the water
- Form reef structures that create important habitat

Habitat: Oysters flourish in estuaries where nutrient-rich fresh water meets saltwater

Size: Common to 6 inches; may reach a maximum size of 11 inches

Notes: Oysters require a hard substrate to grow and often grow on the top of other oyster shells; when feeding, oysters can pump and filter over 9 gallons of water in 1 hour

Hard Clams

Southern Quahog (*Mercenaria campechiensis*)

Northern Quahog (*Mercenaria mercenaria*)

Family Veneridae, Venus Clams

Description:

- Clams are bivalve, or two-shelled
- Two adductor muscles are used to close the shell
- Two siphons are used to draw in or expel sea water
- Hatchet-shaped foot used to burrow into sand or mud

Habitat: Found in sediments located from the high-tide line to under 50 feet of water; common on sand or sand-mud bottoms and tolerate a variety of salinities

Size: 1 inch thick across hinge

Notes: May live at least 22 years; growth is more rapid during winter and spring; typically, growth is greater in deeper areas with submerged aquatic vegetation



Queen Conch

Strombus gigas

Family Strombidae, True Conchs

Description:

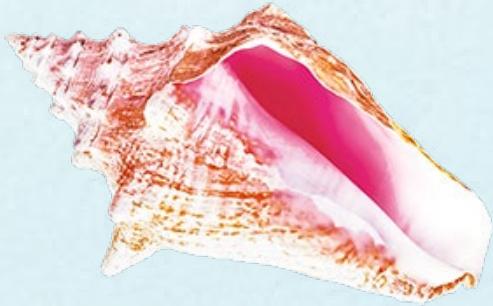
- Slow-moving, long-lived marine snail
- Large, pink-lipped shell
- Soft body with black-speckled foot, two tentacles and a snout-like mouth
- Bright yellow eyes perched on the end of two stalks
- Excellent eyesight

Similar Species: Other marine snails

Habitat: Sandy and hard bottoms and coral rubble; occasionally in seagrass beds; found in Caribbean and western Atlantic Ocean waters, including those around the Florida Keys north to the St. Lucie Inlet on the east coast

Size: Up to 12 inches (5 pounds)

Notes: The meat is a dietary staple for many Caribbean cultures; protected from harvest in federal and state waters



Crustaceans

Blue Crab

Callinectes sapidus

Family Portunidae, Swimming Crabs

Description:

- Brilliant blue color on front claws (tips are red in females) with an olive or blueish-green carapace (shell)
- Pair of paddle shaped legs that are excellent for swimming
- Nine marginal teeth behind each eye, with the last pair of teeth ending in a sharp spine

Habitat: Seagrass beds and other submerged aquatic vegetation areas are important nursery habitats for juvenile blue crabs, while adults utilize grassy and shallow sandy areas

Size: Up to 9 inches in carapace width (from tip-to-tip across carapace)

Notes: In Florida, they spawn from March through November; feed on a variety of plant and animal material and prefer live or fresh prey



Stone Crab

Menippe mercenaria

Family Menippidae, Stone Crabs

Description:

- Carapace (shell) is smooth, heavy and thick
- Claws are enlarged, stout and dark tipped
- Four blunt teeth along front of each side of carapace
- Usually one claw is larger, can be removed from the crab if legal-size and the crab is returned to the water.
- Adults are reddish brown, juveniles are dark blue to purple

Habitat: Reefs and rocky areas; oyster bars in shallow to moderate deep areas

Size: Up to 4 inches in carapace width, with claws reaching 5 inches in length

Notes: Burrow in mud, seagrass or oyster beds



Spiny Lobster

Panulirus argus

Family Palinuridae, Spiny Lobsters

Description:

- Vary in color from almost white to dark red-orange
- Two large, cream-colored spots on the top of the second segment of the tail
- Long antennae over the eyes
- Small antennae-like structures, called antennules, near larger antennae
- Forward-pointing spines cover their bodies for protection from predators

Similar Species: Spotted lobster, *P. guttatus*

Habitat: Hard bottom, seagrass and coral reefs of South Florida and the Caribbean

Size: Up to 15 pounds (18 inches in body length)

Notes: Wave their long antennae to scare off predators, while the smaller antennules are used to sense movement and detect chemicals in the water



Spotted Lobster (Spanish Lobster)

Panulirus guttatus

Family Palinuridae, Spiny Lobsters

Description:

- Lightly colored spots cover body, legs and tail
- Background color is dark purplish-black
- Typically darker background color than that of spiny lobster
- Longitudinal stripes on the three front pairs of walking legs
- Forward-pointing spines cover their bodies for protection from predators

Similar Species: Spiny lobster, *P. argus*

Habitat: Found mainly in crevices in shallow, hard bottom areas of South Florida and the Caribbean

Size: Up to 8 inches in body length

Notes: Wave their long antennae to scare off predators, while the smaller antennules are used to sense movement and detect chemicals in the water



Slipper Lobster (Shovel-Nosed Lobster)

Scyllarides nodifer

Family Scyllaridae, Slipper Lobsters

Description:

- Antennae modified into short, flattened, wide plates
- Ridge along midline of abdomen
- Brown color on body
- Reddish-orange on antennules, legs and scattered on body

Similar Species: Other lobsters

Habitat: Found on rock, coral and sand bottoms in the western Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico

Size: Up to 14 inches in body length

Notes: Consume a variety of mollusks, crustaceans and other bottom-dwelling marine life



Shrimp

Brown shrimp (*Farfantepenaeus aztecus*)

Pink shrimp (*Farfantepenaeus duorarum*)

White shrimp (*Litopenaeus setiferus*)

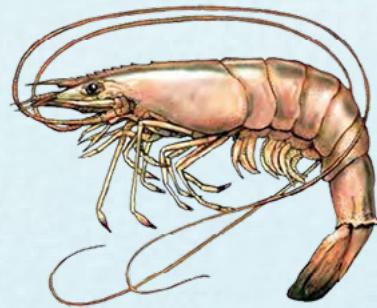
Description:

- Decapod crustaceans with five pairs of legs, often with small pincers
- Large, well-developed eyes, large swimmerets, long antennae and a smooth carapace (shell)
- Brown shrimp: brown in color, with some orange or yellow mixed in; grooves on back at end of abdomen
- Pink shrimp: along the Atlantic coast are usually brown, along the northern Gulf coast are often lemon-yellow, and those in the Florida Tortugas are pink; narrow grooves on back at end of abdomen
- White shrimp: grayish-white with a green, red or blue tinge on the tail and legs; no grooves on back at end of abdomen; longer antennae than pink or brown shrimp

Habitat: Found in a variety of inshore and offshore habitats

Size: Maximum size about 7 to 8 inches in body length

Notes: Most shrimp spawn offshore in deep water from early spring through early fall; young shrimp are carried by currents into coastal estuaries to mature



Horseshoe Crab

Limulus polyphemus

Family Limulidae, Horseshoe Crabs

Description:

- Body covered with protective carapace (shell)
- Nine eyes scattered all over the body
- Two of the eyes are large compound eyes on top of carapace
- Several other light receptors near the tail
- Seven pairs of legs and no antennae
- Spines on rear abdomen for protection from predators
- Harmless telson, or tail, used to right them when overturned

Similar Species: More closely-related to spiders and scorpions than to true crabs

Habitat: Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico; nest on sandy beaches with low wave action

Size: Up to 2 feet in carapace width; males are typically one-third the size of females

Notes: Their eggs are an essential source of food for migratory shorebirds and some fish; considered as "living fossils" since they haven't changed much in the past 450 million years



Mole Crab (Sand Flea, Sand Crab)

Emerita talpoida

Family Hippidae, Mole Crabs

Description:

- Small, oval-shaped crabs that are light brownish-grey in color
- Lack claws
- Two long antennae present
- Filter-feeders

Habitat: Found buried just under the surface of the sand in wave-swept beach areas known as swash zones

Size: Up to about 2 inches in length

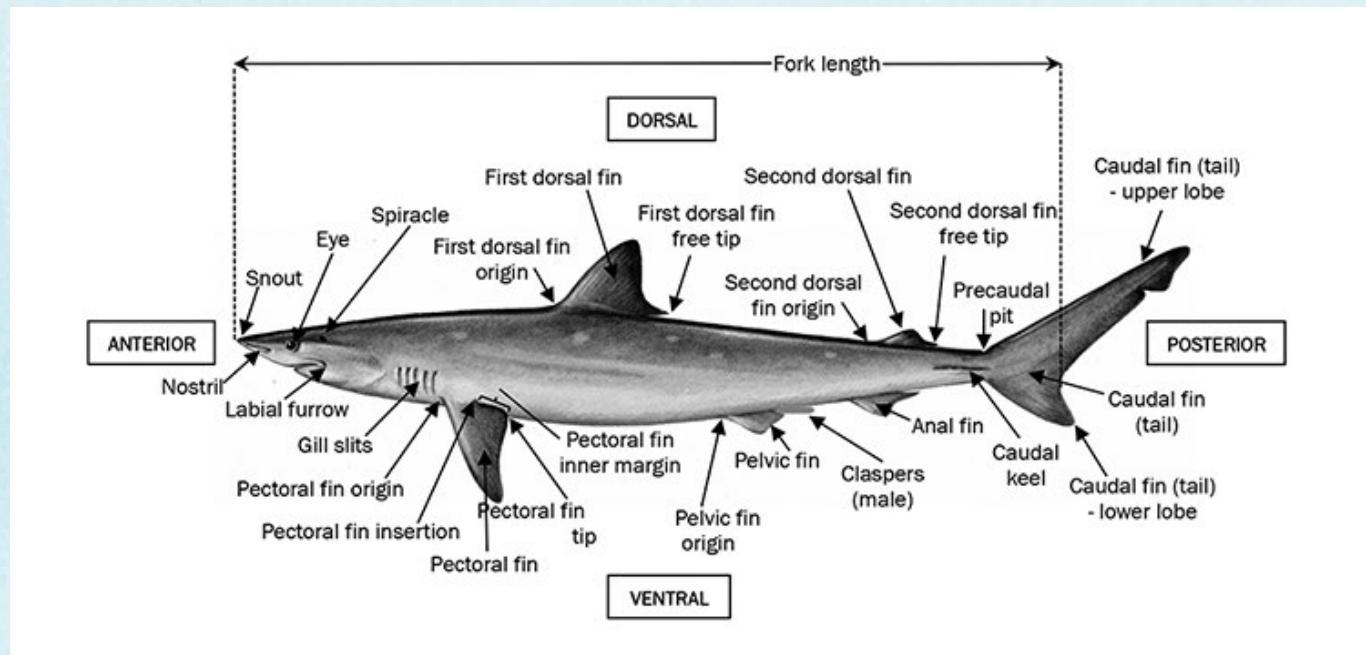
Notes: Commonly sought after by surf fishermen who use them to catch pompano and other fish



Sharks, Rays and Skates

Shark Anatomy

These diagrams show important anatomical characteristics of sharks.

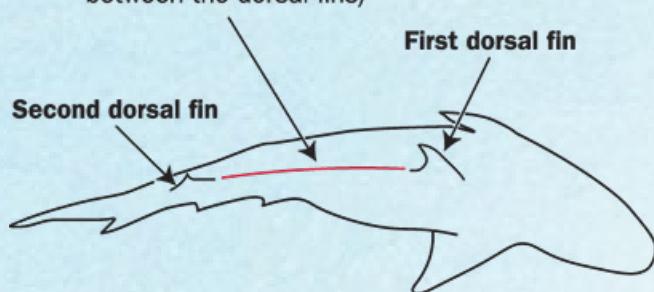


Top view of shark

Bottom view of shark

Interdorsal Ridge

(visible line of raised skin between the dorsal fins)

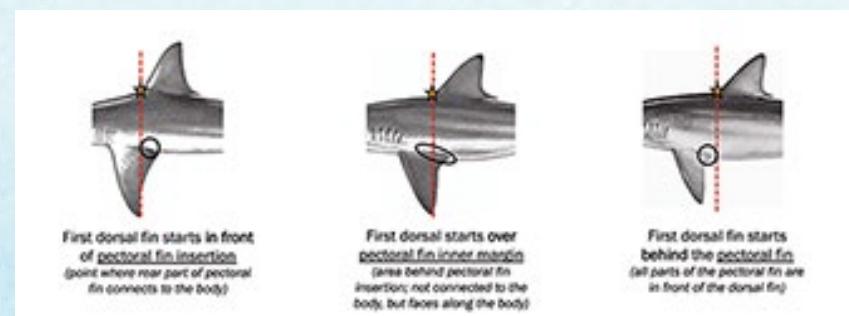


Snout Shapes

Bluntly rounded Moderately rounded Sharply rounded



Spiracle: Opening behind each eye that draws in water to aid in breathing while lying on the bottom.



Blacknose Shark

Carcharhinus acronotus

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

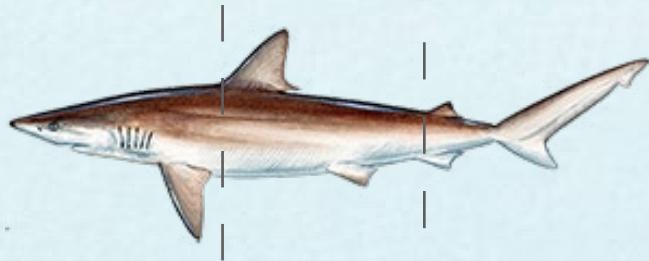
- Black or dusky blotch on snout tip
- Back is pale olive-gray, fading to a whitish belly
- First dorsal fin starts immediately behind the pectoral fin
- Second dorsal fin starts before middle of anal fin
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Atlantic sharpnose shark, *R. terraenovae* (lacks dark snout tip)

Size: Up to 5 feet

Habitat: Coastal waters; common in bays and lagoons

Notes: Feed mostly on small fishes and invertebrates



Atlantic Sharpnose Shark

Rhizoprionodon terraenovae

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

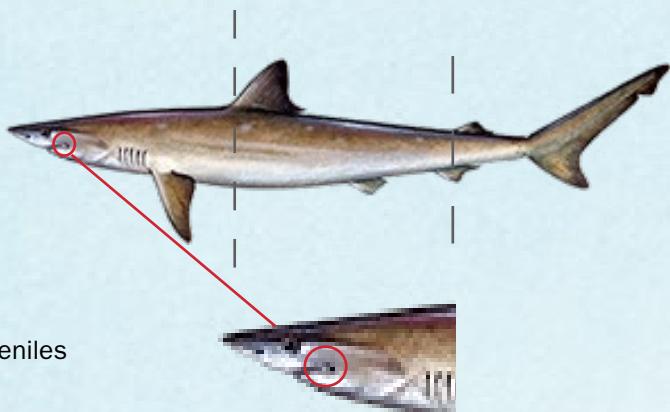
- Body is slender, brown to olive-gray on back, fading to a whitish belly
- Snout is long and sharply rounded
- Very long upper labial furrow (groove around the lips)
- Dorsal and caudal fins with black edges, especially in juveniles
- First dorsal fin starts well behind pectoral fin
- Second dorsal fin starts over the middle of the anal fin
- Adults may have small white spots on sides
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Blacknose shark, *C. acronotus* (has dark snout tip)

Habitat: Coastal waters; can be found near the surf zone; common in bays and estuaries; Adults also found offshore

Size: Up to 4 feet

Notes: Feed on small fishes and invertebrates



Blacktip Shark

Carcharhinus limbatus

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

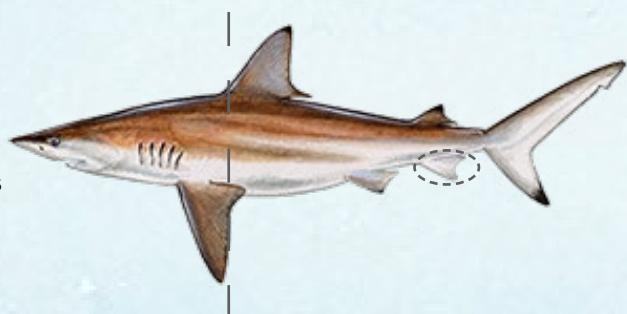
- Back is dark bluish-gray (juveniles more pale) fading to a whitish belly
- Anal fin lacks black tip (in adults); dorsal fins, pectoral fins, anal fin and caudal fin lower lobe are black-tipped in juveniles (fades with growth)
- First dorsal fin starts above pectoral fin inner margin
- Long snout that appears nearly V-shaped from below
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Spinner shark, *C. brevipinna* (first dorsal fin starts behind the pectoral fin; anal fin is black-tipped)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters

Size: Up to 6.5 feet

Notes: One of the most common shark species in Florida coastal waters



Spinner Shark

Carcharhinus brevipinna

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

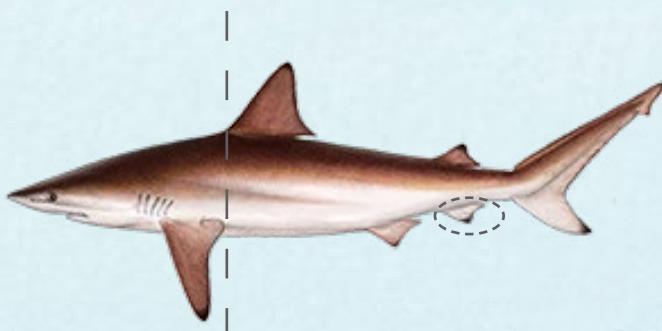
- Back is gray-bronze, fading to a white belly
- Snout pointed with a length equal to or longer than mouth width
- Anal fin with black tip
- Dorsal fins, pectoral fins and caudal fin lower lobe also black-tipped
- First dorsal fin starts behind pectoral fin
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Blacktip shark, *C. limbatus* (first dorsal fin begins over the pectoral fin inner margin; anal fin does not have a black tip)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters

Size: Up to 8 or 9 feet

Notes: The spinner shark's name is derived from its habit of leaping out of the water and spinning while in the air (other shark species are known to leap as well)



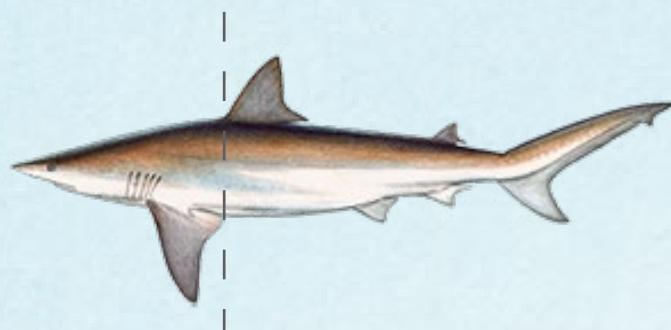
Finetooth Shark

Carcharhinus isodon

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

- Body slender with long gill slits
- Back is gray-blue, fading to a white belly
- Teeth are finely pointed and smooth, similar in both jaws
- Fins are unmarked (no spots, blotches or black edges or tips)
- No interdorsal ridge



Similar Species: Blacktip shark, *C. limbatus* (has black tips on fins); spinner shark, *C. brevipinna* (has black tips on fins); and Atlantic sharpnose shark, *R. terraenovae* (spots on side and long upper labial furrows)

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 4 or 5 feet

Notes: Feed on small fishes and squid

Lemon Shark

Negaprion brevirostris

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

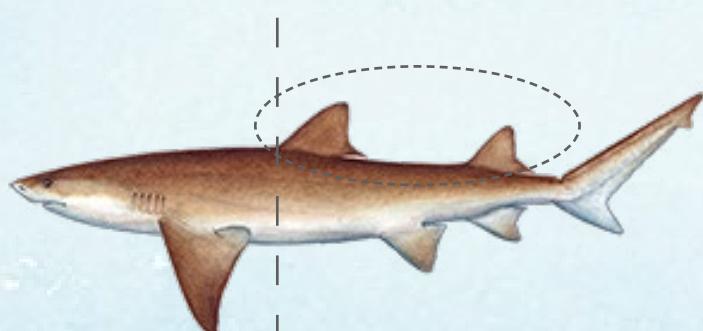
- Snout bluntly rounded, shorter than width of mouth
- Back is yellowish-green, brown or olive-gray, fading to a white belly
- First and second dorsal fins are nearly equal in size
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Bull shark, *C. leucas* (first and second dorsal fins are unequal in size); nurse shark, *G. cirratum* (has nasal barbels)

Habitat: Coastal waters, including nearshore and in estuaries

Size: Up to 10.5 feet

Notes: Feeds on fishes, invertebrates, small sharks, rays and occasionally on sea birds; may enter freshwater



Bull Shark

Carcharhinus leucas

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

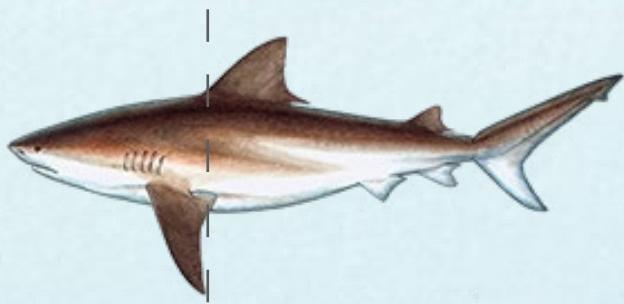
- Back is pale to dark gray, fading to a white belly
- Snout bluntly rounded, much shorter than width of mouth
- Large triangular first dorsal fin; begins over or just behind pectoral fin insertion
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Lemon shark, *N. brevirostris* (first and second dorsal fins nearly equal in size); Caribbean reef shark, *C. perezi* (has interdorsal ridge); and sandbar shark, *C. plumbeus* (first dorsal fin starts before pectoral fin insertion)

Habitat: Estuarine, nearshore and offshore waters

Size: Up to 9 or 10 feet

Notes: One of the few shark species that may inhabit freshwater, sometimes venturing hundreds of miles inland via coastal river systems; more aggressive than most shark species



Blue Shark

Prionace glauca

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

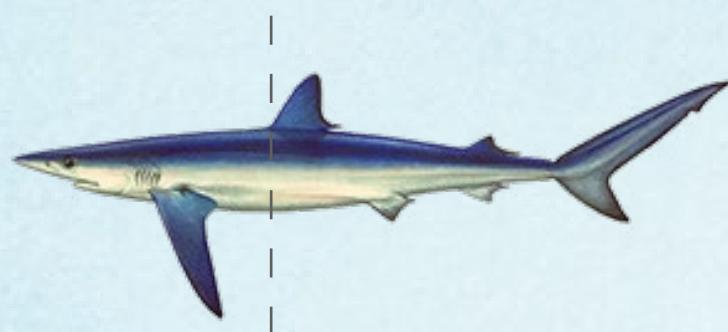
- Body slender with long narrow pectoral fins
- Long sharply rounded snout, longer than width of mouth
- Body color is blue, fading to a white belly
- First dorsal fin starts well behind the pectoral fin
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Shortfin mako, *I. oxyrinchus* (tail in shape of crescent moon)

Habitat: Found mostly in offshore oceanic waters

Size: Up to 12.5 feet

Notes: Feed on a variety of fishes, small sharks and squid



Caribbean Reef Shark

Carcharhinus perezi

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

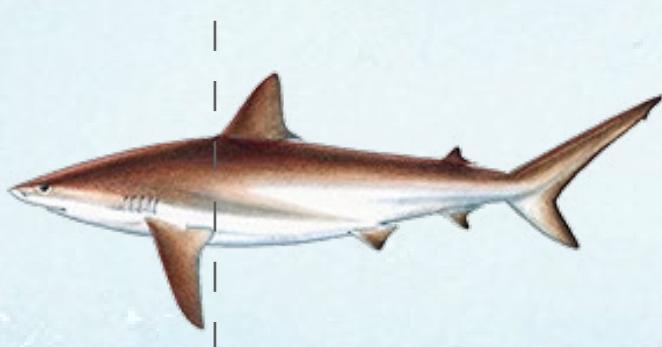
- Back dark gray to gray-brown, fading to a white belly
- Snout short and bluntly rounded
- First dorsal fin starts over pectoral fin free tip
- Fins dusky-colored, with very short free tip on second dorsal fin
- Interdorsal ridge present

Similar Species: Dusky shark, *C. obscurus* (longer free tip on second dorsal fin); bull shark, *C. leucas* (no interdorsal ridge); and sandbar shark, *C. plumbeus* (first dorsal fin starts in front of pectoral fin insertion)

Habitat: Found near coral reefs in the Caribbean and off South America; rarely found north of the Florida Keys

Size: Up to 8 feet

Notes: Feed mainly on a variety of fishes



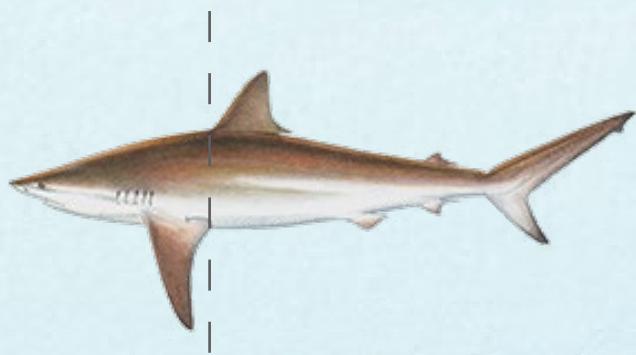
Dusky Shark

Carcharhinus obscurus

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

- Back is bronze-gray to blue-gray, fading to a white belly
- Snout moderately rounded, shorter than or equal to mouth width
- Second dorsal fin free tip less than twice as long as fin height
- First dorsal fin starts over the pectoral fin free tip
- Interdorsal ridge present



Similar Species: Sandbar shark, *C. plumbeus* (first dorsal fin starts in front of pectoral fin insertion); silky shark, *C. falciformis* (first dorsal fin starts behind pectoral fin free tip; longer second dorsal fin free tip)

Habitat: Nearshore and offshore waters; avoid estuaries with low salinities

Size: Up to 12 feet

Notes: May live up to 40 years; feed on other sharks, fishes and squid

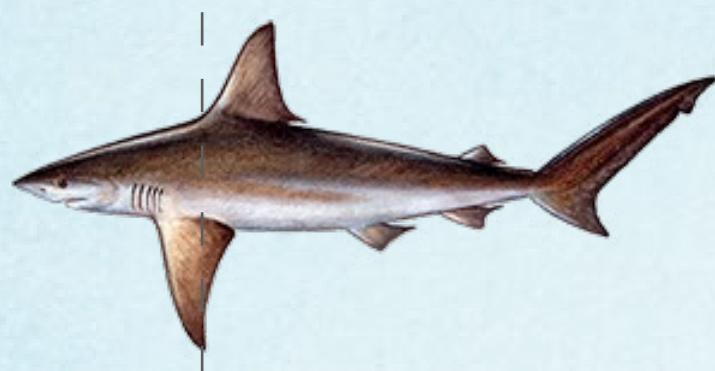
Sandbar Shark

Carcharhinus plumbeus

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

- Snout broadly rounded and short
- First dorsal fin is large and triangular, begins over or in front of pectoral fin insertion
- Back is brown or gray, fading to a white belly
- Interdorsal ridge present



Similar Species: Dusky shark, *C. obscurus* (first dorsal starts over pectoral fin free tip); bull shark, *C. leucas* (no interdorsal ridge)

Habitat: Coastal and offshore waters; may enter estuaries

Size: Up to 8 feet

Notes: Mature at about 6 feet in length; feed on fishes and invertebrates

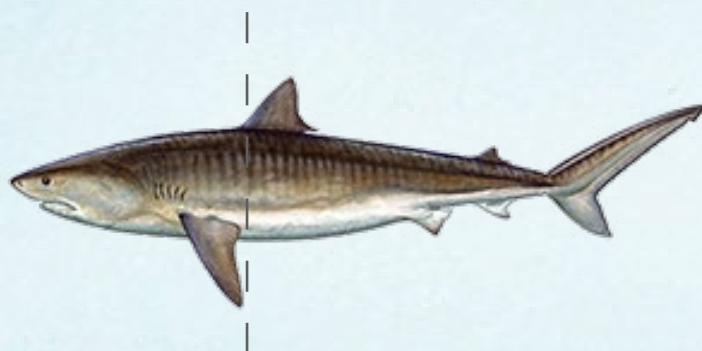
Tiger Shark

Galeocerdo cuvier

Family Carcharhinidae, Requiem Sharks

Description:

- Snout bluntly rounded, much shorter than mouth width
- Serrated teeth with deep notch on outer margins
- Spiracles present, small
- Adults have tiger-like vertical bars that fade with age
- Juveniles have bluish or green-gray to black backs with dark blotches
- Low interdorsal ridge present



Similar Species: Teeth, short snout and markings distinguish this species from all other Carcharhinids

Habitat: Coastal and offshore waters

Size: Up to 15.5 feet

Notes: Voracious feeders that will eat just about anything; second only to the great white shark in the number of attacks on humans worldwide

Sand Tiger Shark

Carcharias taurus

Family Odontaspididae, Sand Tiger Sharks

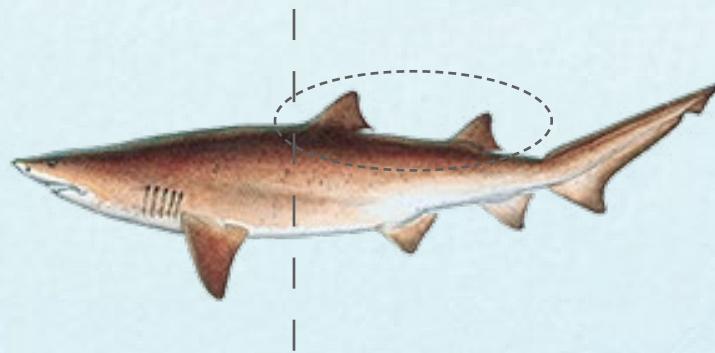
Description:

- Snout flattened and sharply rounded
- Light brown with irregular dark spots on body
- First dorsal fin starts well behind pectoral fin
- First and second dorsal fins of equal size
- All 5 gill slits are in front of the pectoral fin
- Small eyes and a long mouth that extends behind the eyes
- No interdorsal ridge

Habitat: Coastal waters near bays and in deeper waters around reef areas

Size: Up to 10 feet

Notes: Juveniles are cannibalistic and will feed on siblings while in the womb



Shortfin Mako Shark

Isurus oxyrinchus

Family Lamnidae, Mackerel Sharks

Description:

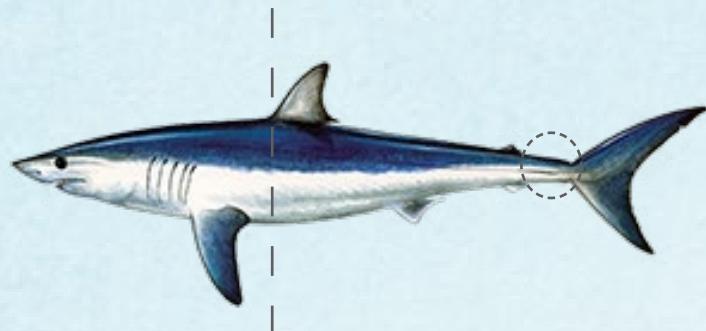
- Lunate tail (shaped like a crescent moon) with lobes of similar size
- Single lateral keel at base of tail
- Back is a deep blue color, fading to a white belly
- Snout is sharply pointed with a white underside
- First dorsal fin starts behind free tip of pectoral fin
- Teeth are long, narrow and recurved with smooth edges
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: White shark, *C. carcharias* (teeth are serrated and triangular); and longfin mako, *I. paucus* (area under snout is dusky or blue-black)

Habitat: Offshore fish often seen near the surface

Size: Up to 12 feet

Notes: A strong swimmer that may leap out of the water when hooked; feed on many large fish species



Common Thresher Shark

Alopias vulpinus

Family Alopiidae, Thresher Sharks

Description:

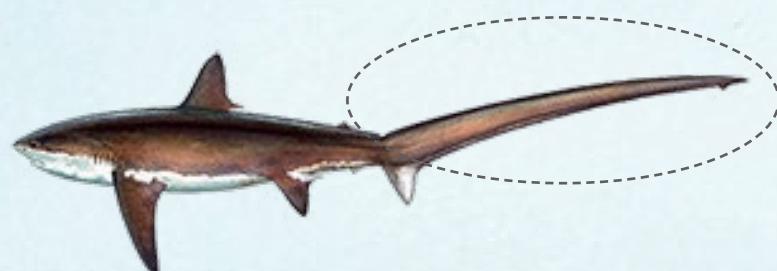
- Huge caudal fin upper lobe, nearly equal to length of body
- White patches extending from abdomen above pectoral fin bases
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Bigeye thresher shark, *A. superciliosus* (has larger eyes and V-groove on top of head)

Habitat: Coastal and offshore waters; juveniles found more inshore

Size: Up to 20 feet

Notes: Long caudal fin is used to herd and stun schools of fish, which make up most of its diet



Nurse Shark

Ginglymostoma cirratum

Family Ginglymostomatidae, Nurse Sharks

Description:

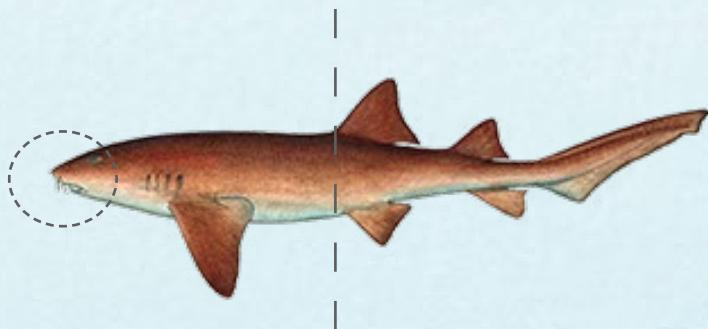
- Very blunt mouth with nasal barbels on each side
- Eyes very small
- Brown to yellow-brown above, lighter below (juveniles often have black spots)
- Broadly rounded dorsal and anal fins
- First and second dorsal fins are similar in size
- First dorsal fin begins well behind pectoral fins
- No distinct lower lobe of caudal fin
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Lemon shark, *N. brevirostris* (lacks nasal barbels)

Habitat: Coastal and nearshore waters; often seen lying motionless on the bottom

Size: Up to 9 feet

Notes: Feed on fishes and bottom-dwelling invertebrates



Smooth Dogfish (Dusky Smooth-hound)

Mustelus canis

Family Triakidae, Smooth-hound Sharks

Description:

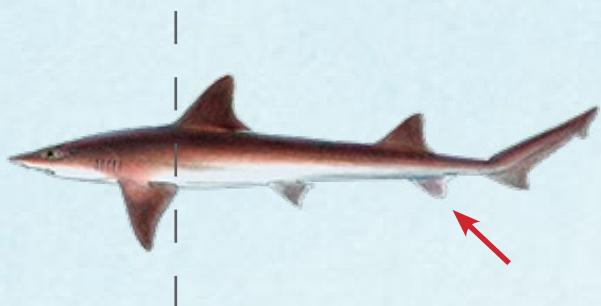
- Grayish-brown color on top, fading to lighter below
- Small, slender shark with two spineless dorsal fins, the second slightly smaller than the first
- Spiracles present
- Caudal fin lower lobe rounded and much shorter than upper lobe
- Upper lobe of caudal fin with deep notch at end
- Interdorsal ridge present

Similar Species: Spiny dogfish, *S. acanthias* (lacks anal fin and has one spine in front of each dorsal fin)

Habitat: Found inshore in bays, nearshore and offshore near reefs and banks

Size: Up to 5 feet

Notes: Feed on the bottom, scavenging and preying upon large crustaceans



Spiny Dogfish

Squalus acanthias

Family Squalidae, Dogfish Sharks

Description:

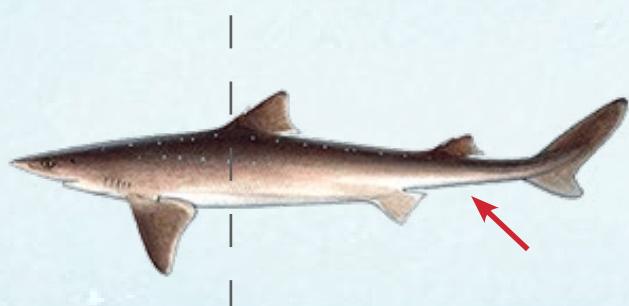
- Blueish-gray back, white spots on sides and a white belly
- Slender body with a long, narrow and pointed snout
- One spine in front of each of the two dorsal fins
- First dorsal fin starts just behind pectoral fin
- Spiracles present
- No anal fin present
- Pale caudal fin with white edge and black blotch on upper lobe
- No interdorsal ridge

Similar Species: Smooth dogfish, *M. canis* (has anal fin and lacks dorsal spines)

Habitat: Coastal waters on the east coast, usually near the bottom; tolerate brackish water

Size: Up to 5 feet

Notes: Forage in large schools; feed on fishes and invertebrates



Scalloped Hammerhead Shark

Sphyrna lewini

Family Sphyrnidae, Hammerhead Sharks

Description:

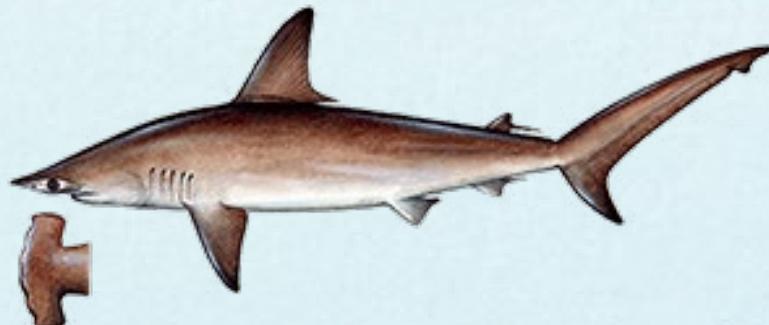
- Head is flattened and extends to hammer-like lobes on each side
- Indentation on front of head at its midpoint
- Teeth have smooth edges
- Back is gray-brown to olive, fading to a white belly
- Underside of pectoral fins tipped with black
- Pelvic fin rear edge nearly straight

Similar Species: Smooth hammerhead, *S. zygaena* (no indentation on front of head at midpoint); great hammerhead, *S. mokarran* (sides of head not pointed)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters

Size: Up to 12 feet

Notes: Feed on fishes, stringrays and squid; males mature at about 6 feet



Bonnethhead Shark

Sphyrna tiburo

Family Sphyrnidae, Hammerhead Sharks

Description:

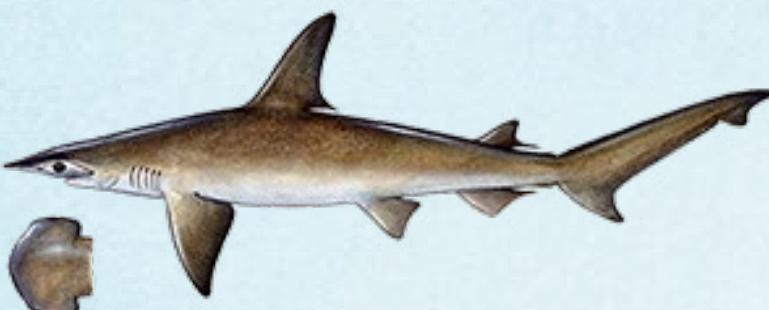
- Head is broadly widened into the shape of a shovel
- Front of head NOT notched at midline
- Back is gray or grayish-brown in color

Similar Species: Other hammerhead sharks obtain larger size and have hammer-shaped heads

Habitat: Coastal waters, including bays and estuaries

Size: Up to 4.5 feet

Notes: Mature at about 3 feet in length and produce 6 to 12 young at a time; feed mainly on crabs and other crustaceans



Southern Stingray

Dasyatis americana

Family Dasyatidae, Stingrays

Description:

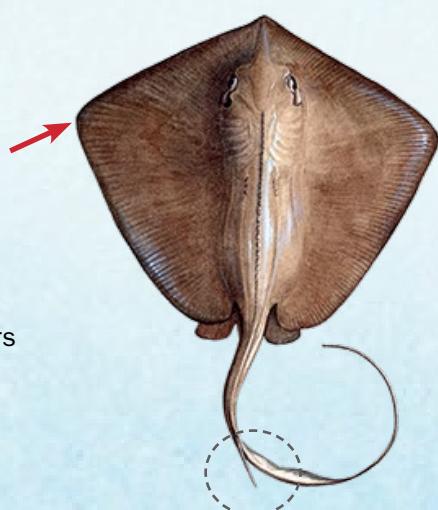
- Disk almost a perfect rhombus, with pointed corners
- Fin-fold on underside of tail is long and high, usually dusky or black in color
- Fin-fold on back is very low or absent
- Back is dark brown (more gray in juveniles)
- Defensive venomous barb near base of long whip-like tail

Similar Species: Atlantic stingray, *D. sabina* (snout sharply pointed); other stingrays; whip-like tail with venomous barb differentiates them from skates

Habitat: Bottom-dwelling species common in bays, estuaries and coastal waters

Size: Up to 5 feet in disk width

Notes: Feed on invertebrates and small fishes



Atlantic Stingray

Dasyatis sabina

Family Dasyatidae, Stingrays

Description:

- Brownish to yellow-brown on back and white underneath
- Corners of disk are rounded
- Snout pointed and projecting
- Defensive venomous barb near base of long whip-like tail
- Low dorsal and ventral fin folds on tail which are light-brown or dusky in color

Similar Species: Other stingrays are typically larger and lack a pointed snout; whip-like tail with venomous barb differentiates them from skates

Habitat: Bottom-dwelling species that inhabits coastal waters, including estuaries, lagoons and sometimes rivers

Size: Up to 2 feet in disk width

Notes: Feed on benthic invertebrates, polychaete worms, small crustaceans, shrimp, crabs, mollusks and sometimes small fishes



Clearnose Skate

Raja eglanteria

Family Rajidae, Skates

Description:

- Brown or gray in color and white underneath
- Small, dark spots and bars on back, but they are not ocellated
- Snout is pointed and translucent on either side
- Single row of spines located on disc behind spiracles, continuing to tail
- Dorsal fins similar in size and located near end of caudal fin (tail)
- Lack venomous barb

Similar Species: Other skate species; stingrays have a similar body shape, but possess a long whip-like tail equipped with a venomous spine

Habitat: Coastal and offshore species, found in brackish and salt waters over soft, sandy bottoms to depths up to 390 feet

Size: Up to 1.5 feet in disk width

Notes: Feed on crustaceans, mollusks and other small invertebrates



Saltwater Fishes

Ladyfish (Skipjack, Ten-Pounder)

Elops saurus

Family Elopidae, Ladyfishes

Description:

- Silver color on body, with a blueish back
- Head small and pointed
- Mouth terminal (at the very front of head)
- Slender body with small scales
- Last dorsal ray not extended into long filament



Similar Species: Juvenile tarpon, *M. atlanticus*; and bonefish, *A. vulpes*

Habitat: Inshore fish, found in bays and estuaries; occasionally enter freshwater

Size: 36 inches (2 to 3 pounds)

Notes: Spawn offshore, peaking in the fall; adults feed on fish and crustaceans; often form large schools; leap when hooked

Tarpon

Megalops atlanticus

Family Megalopidae, Tarpons

Description:

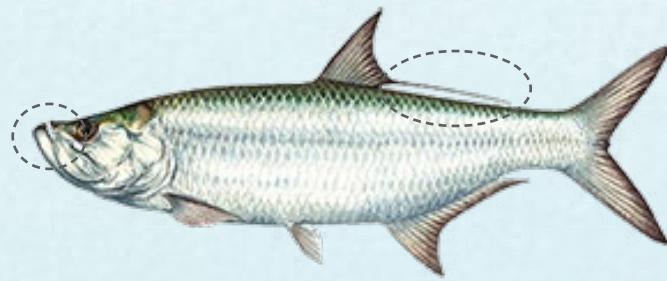
- Back is dark blue-green or greenish-black, becoming bright silver on the sides
- One dorsal fin; last ray of dorsal fin extended into a long filament
- Very large scales
- Mouth large and points upward

Similar Species: As juveniles, tarpon resemble ladyfish, *E. saurus*

Habitat: Primarily inshore fish; adults spawn offshore

Size: Up to 8 feet (300 pounds)

Notes: Slow-growing, matures at 7 to 13 years of age; spawn between May and September; females may lay more than 12 million eggs; develop into a ribbon-like larval stage; tolerate a wide range of salinity; juveniles commonly found in freshwater; gulp air at the surface; feed on fish and large crustaceans



Bonefish

Albula vulpes

Family Albulidae, Bonefishes

Description:

- Silvery color with a bluish or greenish back
- Slender, round body
- Snout long and overhanging lower jaw
- Dark streaks on upper half of body and faint cross-bands extending down to lateral line
- Extremities of dorsal and caudal fins are shaded with black



Similar Species: Ladyfish, *E. saurus* (mouth terminal, at the very front of head)

Habitat: Inshore fish inhabiting shallow waters often less than one foot deep, usually over lush seagrass flats, but occasionally over white sand

Size: Up to 18 pounds; rarely more than 10 pounds

Notes: Travels in loose schools; roots out shrimp, shellfish, crabs and fish from the bottom; spawns offshore

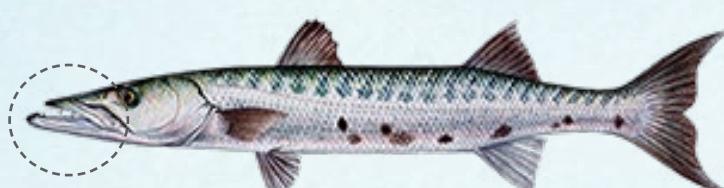
Great Barracuda

Sphyraena barracuda

Family Sphyraenidae, Barracudas

Description:

- Gray with a greenish color on the back, shading to a lighter belly
- Mouth with prominent, sharp teeth; lower jaw protrudes past upper jaw
- Black blotches on lower sides
- Diagonal dark bars on upper sides (not always evident)
- Tail color is dark with white tips
- Young have dark stripe on side that breaks into dark blotches with age



Habitat: Range inshore to offshore; young found inshore in seagrass beds

Size: Up to 106 pounds

Notes: Top predator in reef areas, consuming fishes, squid and shrimp; consuming larger barracuda may cause ciguatera poisoning

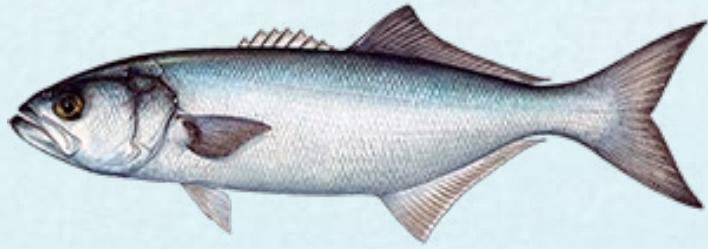
Bluefish

Pomatomus saltatrix

Family Pomatomidae, Bluefishes

Description:

- Color blue or greenish-blue on back, sides silvery
- Mouth large with prominent teeth
- Dorsal and anal fins nearly the same size
- Black blotch at base of pectoral fins
- Scales small; lateral line almost straight



Similar Species: Blue runner, *C. cryos* (has scutes and pectoral fin extends to anal fin)

Habitat: Young usually found inshore during spring and summer, moving offshore to join adults in fall and winter; strong migration of northeast Atlantic stock to Florida east coast in winter

Size: Most Gulf coast catches under 3 pounds; much larger on Atlantic coast, up to 27 pounds

Notes: Travels in large schools of similar-sized fish, following schools of baitfish; sometimes cannibalistic; spawning occurs offshore in spring and summer

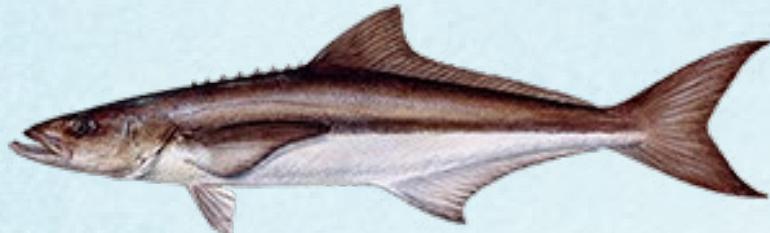
Cobia (Ling, Lemonfish)

Rachycentron canadum

Family Rachycentridae, Cobia

Description:

- Long, slim fish with a broad, depressed head
- Brown in color, fading to a whitish belly
- Dark lateral stripe extending through eye to tail
- Lower jaw projects past upper jaw
- Young have alternating black and white horizontal stripes



Similar Species: Remora, *E. naucrates* (sucker disk present on top of head)

Habitat: Inshore and nearshore inhabiting inlets, bays and among mangroves; frequently seen around buoys, pilings and wrecks

Size: Up to 6 feet (150 pounds); common from 10 to 50 pounds

Notes: Spawns in spring and early summer; feeds on crabs, squid and small fishes

Tripletail

Lobotes surinamensis

Family Lobotidae, Tripletails

Description:

- Upper profile concave at nape
- Elongated dorsal and anal fins give the illusion of three tails
- Head and body typically has blotches of tan to yellow or dark brown
- Edge of preopercle (cheek) very serrated



Habitat: Found in bays and estuaries to offshore waters

Size: Up to 42 inches

Notes: Associate strongly with floating objects such as buoys or channel markers

Hogfish (Hog Snapper)

Lachnolaimus maximus

Family Labridae, Wrasses

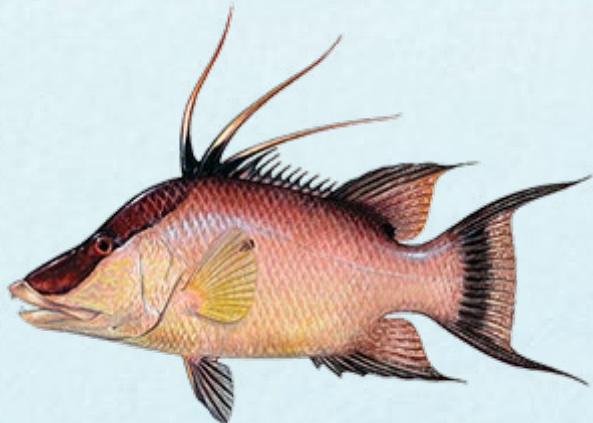
Description:

- First 3 spines of dorsal fin greatly elongated
- Black blotch near end of dorsal fin
- Body deep, strongly compressed
- Snout elongated in adults
- Tail with elongated upper and lower lobes
- Young mottled with various colors, fading with age

Habitat: Rocky bottoms, ledges and reefs offshore; young associated with seagrass beds

Size: Up to 36 inches

Notes: Popular food fish



Gray Triggerfish

Balistes capriscus

Family Balistidae, Triggerfishes

Description:

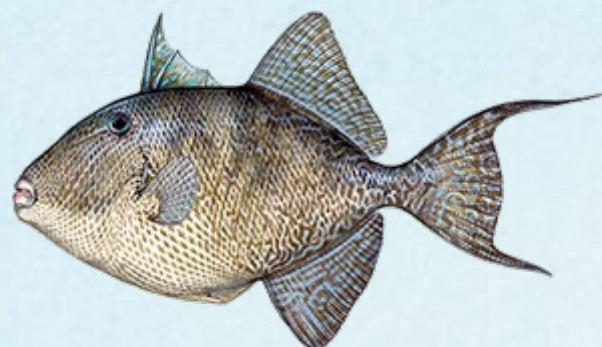
- Olive-gray in color with plate-like scales
- Small mouth with chisel-like teeth used for crushing
- Dorsal and anal fins marbled
- Upper and lower lobes of tail elongated in large adults
- Young have large dark spots on the back (sometimes persist in adults)

Similar Species: Other triggerfish

Habitat: Hard-bottoms, reefs and ledges

Size: Up to 17 inches

Notes: Triggerfish can raise and lock their first dorsal spine; pressing down on the second dorsal spine acts as a trigger, unlocking the first spine



Dolphinfish (Mahi-Mahi, Dorado)

Coryphaena hippurus

Family Coryphaenidae, Dolphinfishes

Description:

- Bright greenish blue back with yellow on sides
- Single dark dorsal fin extends from above the eye to the tail
- Capable of flashing purple, chartreuse and a wide range of other colors
- Body tapers sharply from head to tail
- Irregular blue or golden blotches scattered over sides
- Profile of head on adult males is nearly vertical
- Profile of head on females is more sloping



Similar Species: Pompano dolphinfish, *C. equiselis* (has square-shaped tooth patch on tongue; dolphinfish have an oval-shaped tooth patch on tongue)

Habitat: Offshore in warm waters

Size: Up to 63 inches (88 pounds); common to 30 pounds

Notes: One of the fastest-growing fish, thought to live no more than 5 years; spawns in warm oceanic currents throughout much of the year; young associate with sargassum; diet includes flying fish and squid

Ballyhoo

Hemiramphus brasiliensis

Family Hemiramphidae, Halfbeaks

Description:

- Elongated lower jaw and long, cylindrical body
- Pectoral fin is short
- Pelvic fin extends past beginning of dorsal fin
- Tip of lower jaw and upper lobe of caudal fin orange-red
- Dorsal and anal fins lack scales

Similar Species: Other halfbeaks

Habitat: Young are found in open waters; adults found in bays and nearshore waters close to reefs

Size: Up to 16 inches

Notes: Popular bait species



American Shad

Alosa sapidissima

Family Clupeidae, Herrings

Description:

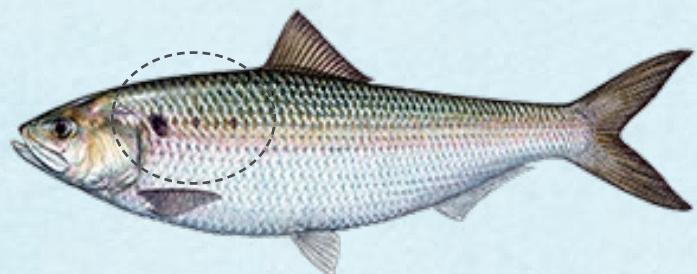
- Green or greenish-blue back with a metallic luster
- Silvery sides and white belly (colors darken when fish enters freshwater)
- Belly with scutes (bone-like projections)
- One or more dark spots in a row behind operculum
- Lower jaw with pointed tip that fits into v-shaped notch in upper jaw

Similar Species: Other herrings (menhaden, which are often referred to as "shad," have a rounded lower jaw tip; American shad is an east coast species)

Habitat: Occur from rivers to offshore waters

Size: Up to 20 inches (12 pounds)

Notes: Enter freshwater to spawn; young remain in freshwater, then move out to sea with age; feed on plankton; important baitfish



Atlantic Thread Herring

Opisthonema oglinum

Family Clupeidae, Herrings

Description:

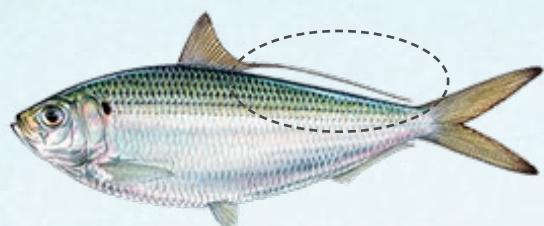
- Dark blue-gray back, silvery sides and a white belly
- Last dorsal fin ray is elongated

Similar Species: American shad, *A. sapidissima*; and threadfin shad, *D. petenense*

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 12 inches

Notes: Filter-feed on plankton and eat small fishes, crabs and shrimp



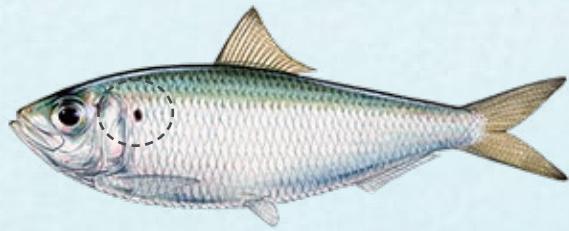
Scaled Sardine (Pilchard, Greenback)

Harengula jaguana

Family Clupeidae, Herrings

Description:

- Solid-color on back with dark streaks
- Usually has a single small, dark spot at upper edge of gill cover
- Sometimes one spot present on shoulder



Similar Species: Spanish sardine, *S. aurita*

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 7 inches

Notes: Popular baitfish that forms schools; spawns offshore

Spanish Sardine

Sardinella aurita

Family Clupeidae, Herrings

Description:

- Slender body
- Bluish-gray back, sometimes greenish
- Sides are silvery or brassy in color



Similar Species: Scaled sardine, *H. janguana*

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 10 inches

Notes: An abundant fish that forms schools

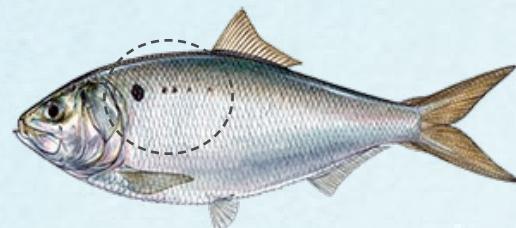
Gulf Menhaden (Pogie)

Brevoortia patronus

Family Clupeidae, Herrings

Description:

- Oval-shaped body that is deep and compressed
- Spot near top of gill cover, often followed by several rows of smaller spots
- Blue-green or blue-brown color on back, sides and belly silver, fins yellowish
- Notch in the middle of upper jaw



Similar Species: Yellowfin menhaden, *B. smithi* (have a single dark spot)

Habitat: Nearshore waters

Size: Rarely over 10 inches

Notes: Spawns offshore across the northern Gulf in the winter; valuable commercial fishery

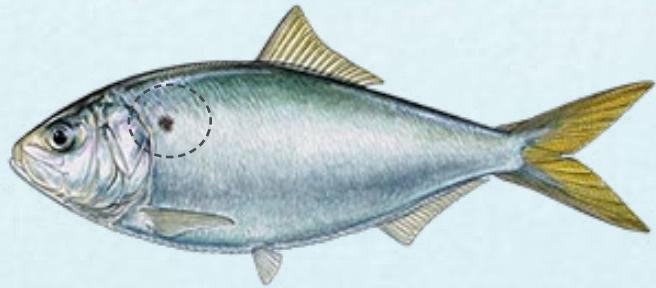
Yellowfin Menhaden

Brevoortia smithi

Family Clupeidae, Herrings

Description:

- Oval-shaped body that is deep and compressed
- Single spot near top of gill cover (not followed by smaller spots)
- Fins are golden yellow
- Silver body with a greenish or bluish back
- Notch in the middle of upper jaw



Similar Species: Gulf menhaden, *B. patronus* (have small spots trailing the prominent dark spot)

Habitat: Found nearshore and in bays and estuaries

Size: Up to 13 inches

Notes: Feeds by filtering phytoplankton

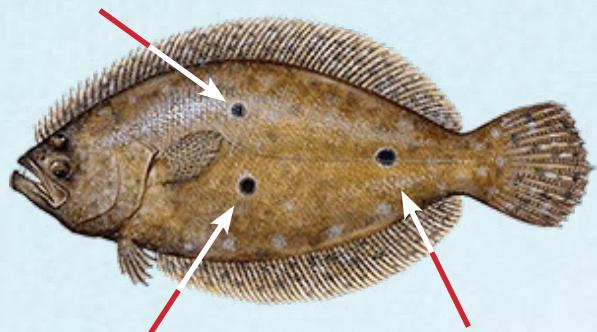
Gulf Flounder

Paralichthys albigutta

Family Paralichthyidae, Large-tooth Flounders

Description:

- Brown body color, with numerous spots and blotches
- Three prominent dark, eyelike spots forming a triangle-shape (one spot on lateral line, one above and one below)
- Numerous white spots scattered throughout body and fins
- Belly is white or dusky
- Strong canine-like teeth
- Wedge-shaped tail, its tip in the middle



Similar Species: Southern flounder, *P. lethostigma* (has no eyelike spots; color pattern is key to distinguishing the two species)

Habitat: Inshore on sandy or mud bottoms, often ranging into tidal creeks; occasionally caught on nearshore rocky reefs

Size: Common to 14 inches (2 pounds)

Notes: Right eye migrates over to left side early in life; a bottom-dweller thought to spawn offshore; feeds on crustaceans and small fishes

Southern Flounder

Paralichthys lethostigma

Family Paralichthyidae, Large-tooth Flounders

Description:

- Light to dark brown color with dark spots and blotches
- No eyelike spots
- Belly is white or dusky
- Strong canine-like teeth
- Wedge-shaped tail, its tip in the middle



Similar Species: Gulf flounder, *P. albigutta* (has three prominent eyelike spots)

Habitat: Brackish bays and estuaries, sometimes ranging into tidal creeks and freshwater

Size: Common to 20 inches

Notes: Right eye migrates over to left side early in life; a bottom-dweller thought to spawn offshore; mostly feeds on small fishes

Hardhead Catfish

Ariopsis felis

Family Ariidae, Sea Catfishes

Description:

- Body brownish to gray-green, with a white to yellowish belly
- Three prominent, sharp spines (one at beginning of dorsal fin and one on each pectoral fin)
- Spines do not have fleshy filaments
- Four barbels on chin
- Barbels at corner of mouth (shorter than head and not flat)



Similar Species: Gafftopsail catfish, *B. marinus* (has two chin barbels and spines with long filaments)

Habitat: Coastal waters; enters brackish waters

Size: Up to 24 inches (12 pounds)

Notes: Males incubate the eggs in their mouth

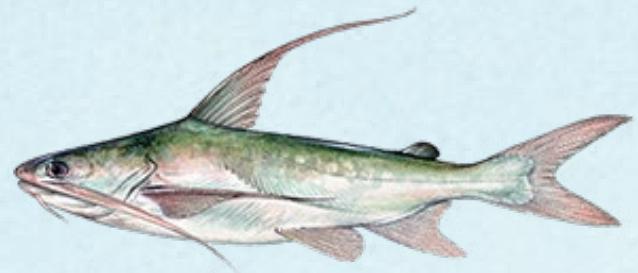
Gafftopsail Catfish

Bagre marinus

Family Ariidae, Sea Catfishes

Description:

- Bluish-green back, fading to a silver-white belly
- Three prominent, sharp spines (one at beginning of dorsal fin and one on each pectoral fin)
- The three prominent spines have elongated, fleshy filaments
- Two barbels on chin
- Barbels at corner of mouth are flattened and very elongated



Similar Species: Hardhead catfish, *A. felis* (has four chin barbels and spines lack filaments)

Habitat: Coastal waters; may enter brackish waters

Size: Up to 27 inches (10 pounds)

Notes: A good food-fish that is usually less common than the hardhead catfish

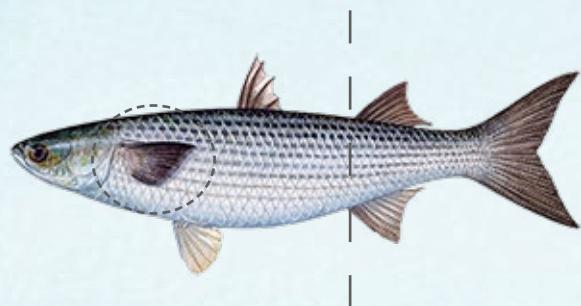
Striped Mullet (Black Mullet)

Mugil cephalus

Family Mugilidae, Mullets

Description:

- Back is bluish-gray or green, shading to silvery sides and a white belly
- Indistinct horizontal black stripes on sides
- Second dorsal fin starts over the beginning of the anal fin
- Blunt nose and small mouth
- No black blotch at base of pectoral fin



Similar Species: Fantail mullet, *M. gyrans*; and white mullet, *M. curema* (both have a black blotch at base of pectoral fin and lack dark stripes)

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Common to 3 pounds

Notes: Adults migrate offshore in large schools to spawn; juveniles migrate inshore at about 1 inch in size; they frequently jump out of the water; consume algae, decaying matter and other tiny marine life

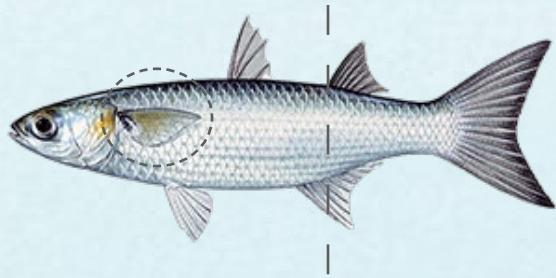
Fantail Mullet

Mugil trichodon

Family Mugilidae, Mullets

Description:

- Back is olive green with blue tints, shading to silvery sides and a white belly
- Anal and pelvic fins yellowish
- Dark blotch at base of pectoral fin
- Second dorsal fin starts behind the beginning of the anal fin
- Inverted V-shaped mouth
- Lacks dark stripes



Similar Species: Striped mullet, *M. cephalus* (has stripes and lacks black blotch at base of pectoral fin), and white mullet, *M. curema* (lacks pigmented second dorsal fin)

Habitat: Coastal waters, occurring along beaches in the fall

Size: Usually less than 1 pound

Notes: Spawn in nearshore or inshore waters during spring and summer; juveniles found inshore; feed on algae, small crustaceans and decaying matter

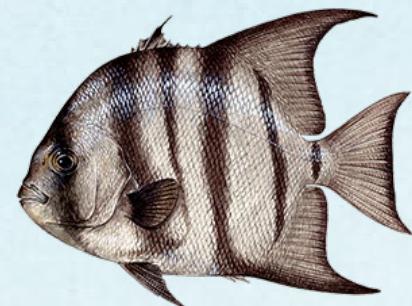
Atlantic Spadefish

Chaetodipterus faber

Family Ephippidae, Spadefishes

Description:

- Silver color with 4 to 6 black vertical bars on each side (may fade in larger fish)
- Deep, compressed body
- First and second dorsal fins separated
- Tail-shape concave
- Second dorsal fin and anal fin elongated
- Young are entirely dark brown or black in color



Similar Species: No close resemblance; frequently called angelfish by mistake

Habitat: Inshore, nearshore, over seagrass beds and around structure

Size: Up to 36 inches (20 pounds); common to 2 pounds

Notes: Spawn in spring and summer; travel in large schools; small juveniles may drift on their sides to mimic floating debris; feed on crustaceans and other invertebrates

Striped Mojarra (Sand Perch)

Eugerres plumieri

Family Gerreidae, Mojarras

Description:

- Dark olive color on back
- Tan to silver on sides, often with a metallic sheen
- Black stripe along center of each scale row, except toward belly
- Anal fins sometimes dark orange
- Three anal spines
- Dorsal and anal spines long and stout
- Pelvic spine and first two anal spines are pale



Similar Species: Other mojarras

Habitat: Brackish and coastal waters (in limestone regions) and seagrass beds

Size: Up to 12 inches

Notes: Often used for bait, but larger specimens may be eaten

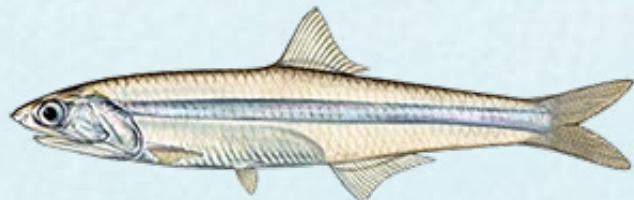
Striped Anchovy

Anchoa hepsetus

Family Engraulidae, Anchovies

Description:

- Snout length somewhat less than eye diameter
- Anal fin begins below middle of dorsal fin
- Silver stripe on body
- Greenish color on back



Similar Species: Bay anchovy, *A. mitchilli* (anal fin begins below beginning of dorsal fin)

Habitat: Shallow bays and estuaries

Size: Up to 6 inches

Notes: Form dense schools and tolerate a wide range of salinities

Bay Anchovy

Anchoa mitchilli

Family Engraulidae, Anchovies

Description:

- Snout very short, only slightly overhanging mouth
- Anal fin begins below beginning of dorsal fin
- Body relatively deep when compared to striped anchovy
- Silver stripe on body, often faint or absent toward front
- Stripe fades after death



Similar Species: Striped anchovy, *A. hepsetus* (anal fin begins below middle of dorsal fin)

Habitat: Shallow bays and estuaries; common in brackish waters

Size: Up to 4 inches

Notes: Form dense schools and tolerate a wide range of salinities

Snook, Family Centropomidae

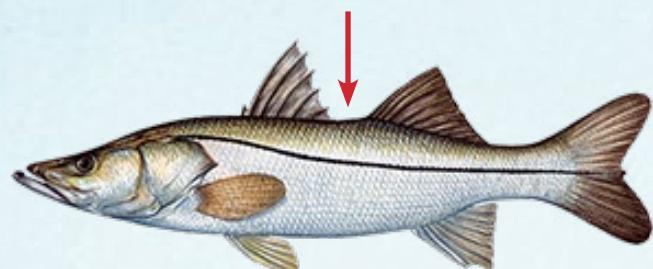
Common Snook

Centropomus undecimalis

Family Centropomidae, Snook

Description:

- Large mouth with a protruding lower jaw
- Jaw reaches below the rear portion of the eye
- Sloping forehead
- High dorsal fin that is divided
- Black lateral line extends onto tail
- Pelvic fin yellow in color



Similar Species: Other snook species

Habitat: Inshore in coastal waters, including mangrove shorelines, seagrass beds, beaches and around structures

Size: Up to 48 inches (50 pounds); grow much larger than other snook species

Notes: Cannot tolerate water temperatures below 60° F; can tolerate freshwater; form schools during spawning season; feed on fish and large crustaceans

Fat Snook

Centropomus parallelus

Family Centropomidae, Snook

Description:

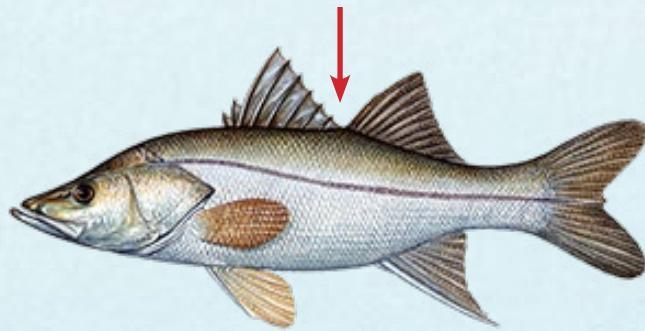
- Deeper body than other snook species
- Mouth reaches below the center of the eye
- Black lateral line extends onto tail
- Yellow-brown to green-brown on back
- Silver color on sides

Similar Species: Other snook species

Habitat: Inshore species found in mangroves; commonly found in freshwater; occurs more in freshwater than other snook species

Size: Common to 10 inches, but may reach 28 inches

Notes: Mangrove shorelines serve as nursery grounds for young



Swordspine Snook

Centropomus ensiferus

Family Centropomidae, Snook

Description:

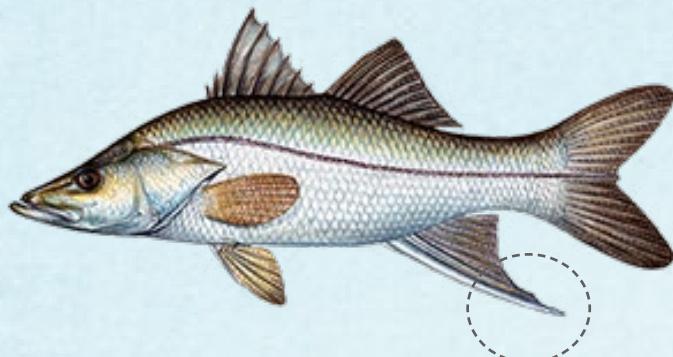
- Anal fin extends past the base of the caudal fin
- Largest scales of all snook
- Color yellow-green to brown-green on back with a silver belly
- Smallest of the snooks
- Profile slightly concave
- Prominent lateral line extends onto tail

Similar Species: Other snook species

Habitat: Occurs in inshore estuarine habitats

Size: Common to 10 inches, but may reach 15 inches

Notes: Mangrove shorelines serve as nursery areas for young; rare on Florida's west coast; prefers only slightly brackish or freshwater



Tarpon Snook

Centropomus pectinatus

Family Centropomidae, Snook

Description:

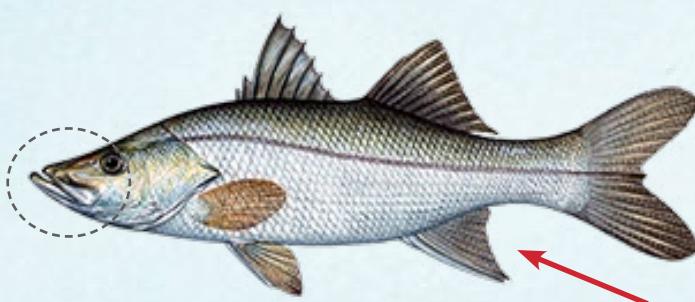
- Only snook with 7 anal fin rays (others have 6)
- Lower jaw curves upward
- Tips of pelvic fins reach beyond anus
- Compressed body
- Prominent black lateral line extends onto tail

Similar Species: Other snook species

Habitat: Inshore in coastal waters; frequently found in freshwater

Size: Common to 15 inches, but may reach 22 inches

Notes: Feed on small fish and large crustaceans; mangrove shorelines serve as nursery areas for young; rare on Florida's west coast



Jacks and Pompanos, Family Carangidae

Banded Rudderfish

Seriola zonata

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

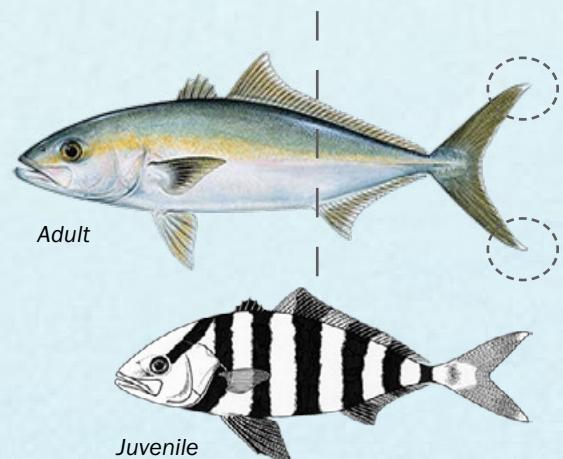
- Adults are bluish, greenish or brown and lack dark vertical bands
- Anal fin is half the length of the second dorsal fin
- Tail has white tips
- Slender body
- Juveniles have six dark bars on body and dark stripe from eye to first dorsal fin

Similar Species: Other jack species

Habitat: Nearshore and offshore over hard bottom, generally in shallower water than other amberjacks; young associated with weed lines or floating debris and may follow sharks and other large fish

Size: Usually under 24 inches (10 pounds)

Notes: Adults feed on fish and shrimp; spawn offshore most of year



Almaco Jack

Seriola rivoliana

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

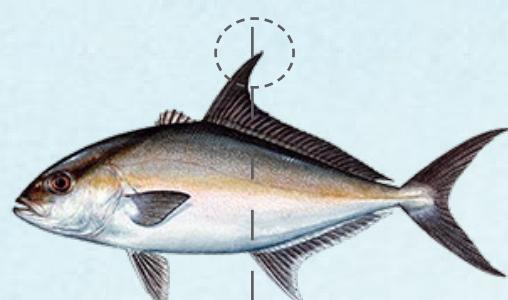
- Front of first dorsal fin and anal fin high and elongated
- Deep-bodied
- Anal fin is about 2/3 the length of the second dorsal fin
- Sometimes dark in coloration
- Body more compressed than banded rudderfish or greater amberjack
- No scutes (bone-like projections) on body

Similar Species: Other jack species

Habitat: Wide-ranging in offshore waters, not a common catch; young are associated with sargassum

Size: Common to 35 inches (10 pounds)

Notes: Spawn offshore during spring, summer and fall



Greater Amberjack

Seriola dumerili

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Descriptions:

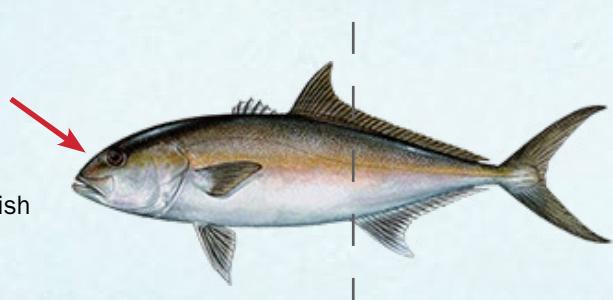
- Olive green or brownish back and silver sides
- Dark stripe from nose to front of dorsal fin that "lights up" when fish is in feeding mode
- Anal fin is about 2/3 the length of the second dorsal fin
- 11-19 gill rakers present on each gill arch (see page 37)
- No scutes (bone-like projections) on body

Similar Species: Other jack species

Habitat: Offshore species associated with rocky reefs, debris and wrecks, typically in 60 to 240 feet of water; sometimes caught nearshore in south Florida; juveniles associate with floating objects and may occur in water less than 30 feet deep

Size: Up to 60 inches (176 pounds); common around 40 inches and under 40 pounds

Notes: Largest of the jacks; thought to spawn offshore throughout much of the year; feeds on squid, fish and crustaceans



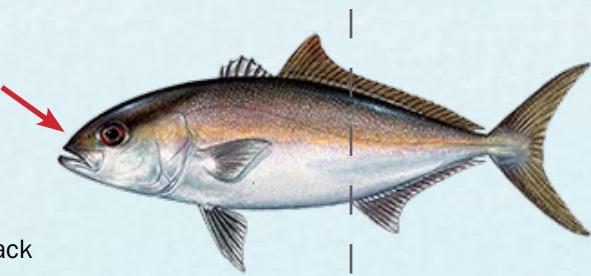
Lesser Amberjack

Seriola fasciata

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Olive green or brownish back and silver sides
- Dark stripe from behind the eye to front of dorsal fin
- Proportionately larger eye and deeper body than greater amberjack
- Anal fin is about 2/3 the length of the second dorsal fin
- 21-24 gill rakers on each gill arch (see page 37)
- Juveniles have split or wavy bars on sides



Similar Species: Other jack species

Habitat: Found nearshore and offshore

Size: Usually less than 20 inches (10 pounds)

Notes: Believed to spawn offshore; adults eat fish and squid

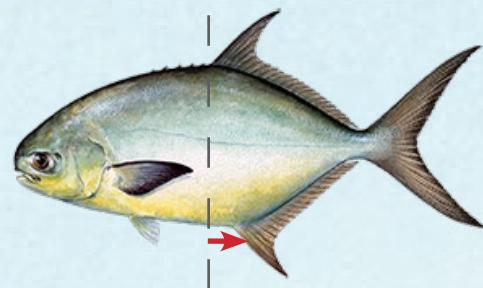
Florida Pompano

Trachinotus carolinus

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Dark greenish-gray on back, shading to silver sides
- Yellowish coloration on belly
- Fish found in dark waters have yellow on throat, pelvic fins and anal fin
- Dorsal fin begins in front of anal fin
- Dorsal, anal and caudal fins are short and upright
- Forehead slopes gently backward
- Deep, compressed body with a small mouth
- Caudal fin with a wider fork than permit



Similar Species: Permit, *T. falcatus* (dorsal fin begins over the anal fin and grow much larger than Florida pompano)

Habitat: Inshore and nearshore waters, especially along sandy beaches, oyster bars and over seagrass beds, often in turbid water; found in water as deep as 130 feet

Size: Up to 24 inches (8 pounds)

Notes: Spawn offshore March to September; feed on mollusks and crustaceans, especially mole crabs (sand fleas)

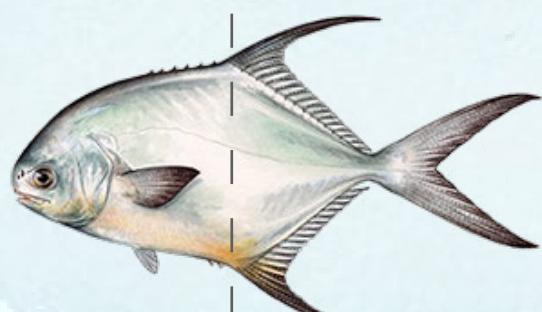
Permit

Trachinotus falcatus

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Gray, dark or iridescent blue back, shading to silver sides
- Fish from dark waters have golden tints on belly
- Dorsal fin begins over anal fin
- Dorsal, anal and caudal fins long and sloped back
- Forehead sharply rises to a "hump" then slopes back
- Compressed body that is deeper than Florida pompano
- Caudal fin has a narrow fork
- Small permit have teeth on their tongue (absent in pompano)



Similar Species: Florida pompano, *T. carolinus* (dorsal fin begins in front of anal fin)

Habitat: Offshore near structure; inshore over grass flats, sand and in channels

Size: Common to 50 pounds

Notes: Feed on small fishes and invertebrates

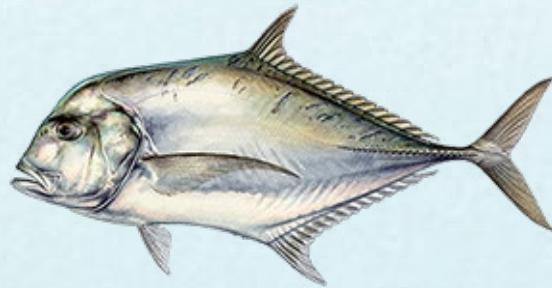
African Pompano

Alectis ciliaris

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Metallic-blue color on back, fading to a white belly
- Body is deep and compressed
- Front of head steep and rounded
- Dorsal fin begins in front of anal fin
- Juveniles have long, threadlike rays at front of dorsal and anal fins
- Scutes (bone-like projections) on sides in front of tail
- Dorsal and anal fins with no more than one finlet each
- Body becomes relatively longer with age



Similar Species: Other pompano species

Habitat: Young found in open waters; adults found to depths of 180 feet, often near reefs, wrecks and ledges

Size: Up to 42 inches (40 pounds)

Notes: Great fighter and good to eat; often found in schools over structure

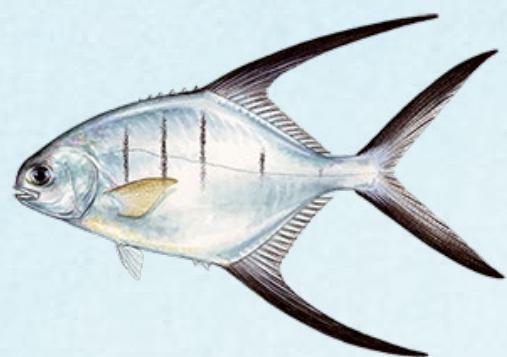
Palometa (Great Pompano)

Trachinotus goodei

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Gray to blue-green on top of head and along the back
- Bright silver sides, yellowish belly
- Very elongated dorsal and anal fins, dusky or black with bluish edges
- Deep body; four narrow bars on the sides, traces of a fifth near the tail
- No scutes (bone-like projections)



Similar Species: Florida pompano, *T. carolinus*; and permit, *T. falcatus* (both lack elongated dorsal and anal fins and lack dark bars on sides)

Habitat: Clear water along sandy beaches and bays; occasionally over reefs

Size: Usually less than 20 inches (1 pound)

Notes: Spawn offshore in spring, summer and fall; most common in south Florida

Crevalle Jack

Caranx hippos

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Back bluish-green to greenish-gold, belly silver or yellowish
- Prominent black spot on gill cover
- Black spot at the base of each pectoral fin
- Second dorsal fin and anal fin almost identical in size
- No scales on throat
- Body deep, front of head steep



Similar Species: Blue runner, *C. cryos* (lack black spot at base of pectoral fins); other jack species

Habitat: Common both inshore and in open waters

Size: Up to 20 pounds and common at 3 to 5 pounds

Notes: Tolerate a wide range of salinities; schools corner a pod of baitfish at the surface; feed mainly on small fishes; peak spawning occurs offshore March through September

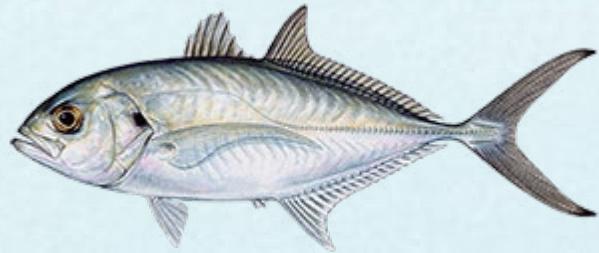
Blue Runner (Hardtail Jack)

Caranx cryos

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Color light-olive to bluish-green on back, with a silver-gray to golden belly
- Usually have black spot on gill cover
- Scutes (bone-like projections) present on sides, in front of tail
- Tail tips black in color



Similar Species: Bluefish, *P. saltatrix*; crevalle jack, *C. hippos* (lacks scutes); and other jack species

Habitat: Juveniles found offshore; adults found inshore and nearshore

Size: Up to 20 inches (4 pounds); and common under 1 pound

Notes: Mature at 9 to 10 inches; spawn offshore January through August; young form schools near floating objects or structure; adults feed on fish, shrimp and squid

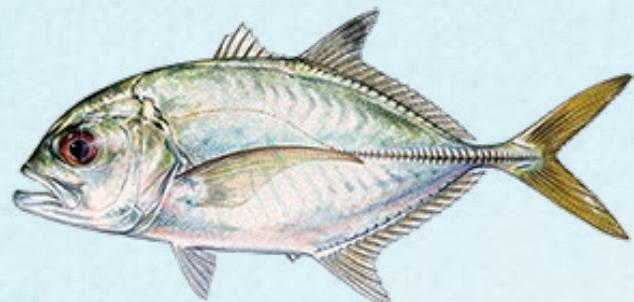
Horse-eye Jack (Big-eye Jack)

Caranx latus

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Front of head less steep than crevalle jack
- Darkly colored scutes (bone-like projections) on sides, just in front of tail
- Lack dark spots on pectoral fins
- Dark spot on gill cover is small or absent
- Caudal fin yellow in color
- Belly is scaly, except in juveniles less than 3 inches long



Similar Species: Other jack species

Habitat: Often found in schools near offshore reefs

Size: Up to 30 inches (8.5 pounds)

Notes: Diet includes fishes, shrimp and other invertebrates

Lookdown

Selene vomer

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Color is silver and iridescent, sometimes with brassy highlights
- Front of head very steep
- Pelvic fins small
- Elongated front filaments of second dorsal fin and anal fin
- Body extremely compressed and deep (plate-like)
- Lateral line arched toward front
- Juveniles with spines on front of dorsal fin and elongated rays on pelvic fin



Similar Species: Other jack species

Habitat: Coastal waters and estuaries over hard or sandy bottom

Size: Up to 12 inches

Notes: Juveniles have faint vertical bars that fade with age

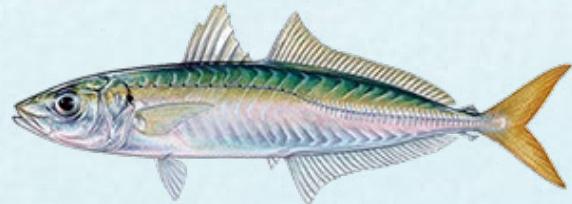
Round Scad (Cigar Minnow, Hardtail)

Decapterus punctatus

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Greenish-blue fading to silver on sides and a white belly
- Long, cigar-shaped body
- Small black spots along lateral line
- Detached dorsal and anal finlets
- Narrow yellow stripe from head to tail



Similar Species: Bigeye scad, *S. crumenophthalmus* (lacks finlets)

Habitat: Found mid-water or near the bottom, juveniles sometimes at surface

Size: Up to 12 inches; common to 7 inches

Notes: Feed on plankton; spawn offshore throughout the year

Bigeye Scad (Goggle-eye)

Selar crumenophthalmus

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Eye very large, diameter greater than snout length
- No detached dorsal and anal finlets
- Two fleshy tabs on inside of rear edge of gill chamber
- Scutes present only on rear part of lateral line



Similar Species: Round scad, *D. punctatus* (has detached dorsal and anal finlets)

Habitat: Prefers clear oceanic waters

Size: Up to 24 inches

Notes: Usually nocturnal and feed at night on invertebrates and plankton

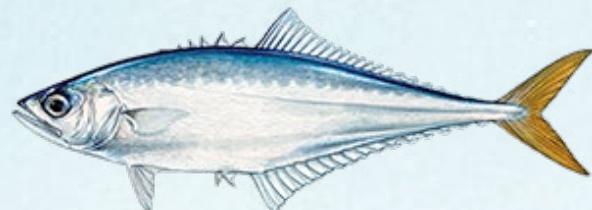
Leatherjacket (Leatherjack)

Oligoplites saurus

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Body silvery-white on sides and belly, with a bluish-green back
- Pectoral and caudal fins yellow
- First dorsal fin has five well-developed, unconnected spines
- Finlets present behind dorsal and anal fins
- Scales tiny and embedded, causing skin to appear smooth
- Long body that is strongly compressed
- Lateral line nearly straight



Similar Species: Other jack species

Habitat: Inshore in bays and estuaries, often in turbid water

Size: Up to 12 inches

Notes: Diet includes small fishes and crustaceans

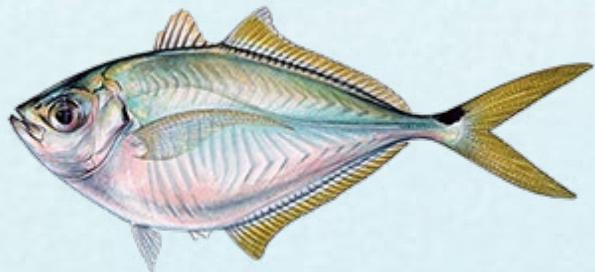
Atlantic Bumper

Chloroscombrus chrysurus

Family Carangidae, Jacks and Pompanos

Description:

- Greenish-blue back, fading to silvery-gold sides and belly
- Black spot on caudal peduncle (just before the tail)
- Lateral line arched at front
- Anal and caudal fins yellow
- Small black area at rear edge of gill cover
- Deep, compressed body with lower profile more curved than upper profile



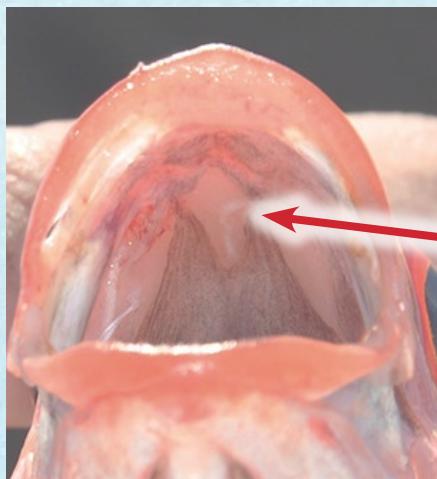
Similar Species: Other jack species

Habitat: Found offshore and inshore in bays and estuaries

Size: Up to 25 inches; common to 10 inches

Notes: Diet includes fishes, invertebrates, plankton and decaying matter; juveniles often found in estuaries in association with jellyfish

Snappers, Family Lutjanidae



Vermilion snapper

Vomerine Tooth Patches

Found on the roof of the mouth
in snappers

Look at the shape of the tooth
patch on the roof of the mouth



Anchor-shaped
Gray snapper, most others



Chevron-shaped
Mutton snapper



Triangular-shaped
Cubera snapper



Rhomboid-like
Vermillion snapper

Red Snapper

Lutjanus campechanus

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

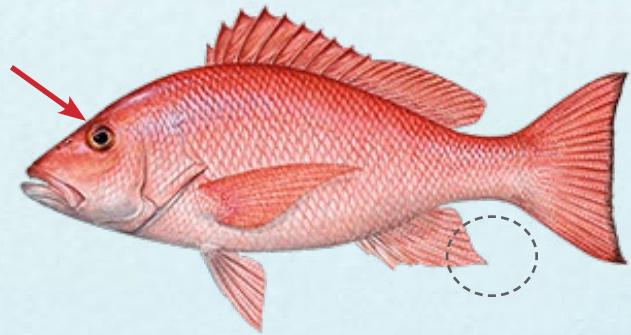
- Body is pinkish-red in color, fading to a white belly
- Snout long and triangular
- Red eye
- Rear of anal fin pointed
- No dark spot on sides in adults

Similar Species: Silk snapper, *L. vivanus* (has a yellow eye); and vermillion snapper, *R. aurorubens* (has rounded anal fin)

Habitat: Offshore near structure

Size: Up to 36 inches (35 pounds)

Notes: Juveniles are found over sand or mud bottoms; adults can live more than 20 years, possibly even up to 60 years; spawn from June to October; feed on fishes and crustaceans



Silk Snapper

Lutjanus vivanus

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

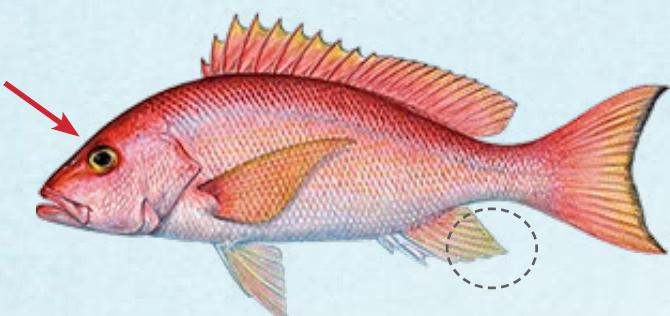
- Body is pinkish-red, fading to a lighter belly
- Sides have undulating yellow lines
- Yellow eye
- Rear of anal fin pointed
- Pectoral fins pale yellow
- Back edge of tail trimmed in black
- No dark spot on sides in adults

Similar Species: Red snapper, *L. campechanus* (has a red eye)

Habitat: Offshore; most common in south Florida

Size: Usually less than 30 inches (5 pounds)

Notes: Spawn late spring through summer; feed on fishes and crustaceans



Vermilion Snapper (Mingo, Beeliner)

Rhomboptilus aurorubens

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

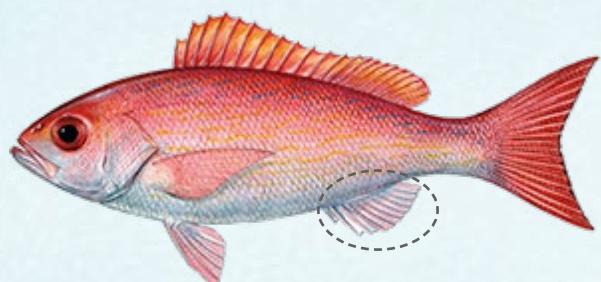
- Rosy-red back, fading to a lighter belly
- May have irregular yellow lines on sides below the lateral line
- Large red eyes
- Anal fin not sharply pointed
- Rhomboid-like vomerine tooth patch (page 67)
- No large canine teeth

Similar Species: Red snapper, *L. campechanus* (has pointed anal fin)

Habitat: Offshore over structure

Size: Up to 24 inches (6 pounds); common to 14 inches and under 2 pounds

Notes: Spawn April to September, feed on fishes and invertebrates



Mahogany Snapper

Lutjanus mahogoni

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

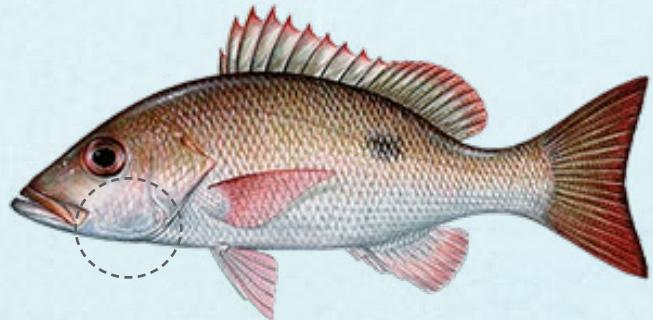
- Olive gray color with a reddish hue, fading to a lighter belly
- Large red eye
- Edges of fins are red
- Dark spot present on lateral line
- Preopercle (cheek) with serrated spur

Similar Species: Lane snapper, *L. synagris* (has yellow stripes and a smaller eye)

Habitat: Prefer clear coastal waters, usually over reefs

Size: Up to 15 inches (3 pounds)

Notes: Feeds at night on small fishes and invertebrates



Blackfin Snapper

Lutjanus buccanella

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

- Color mainly red, fading to silver on lower sides and belly
- Dark crescent-shaped blotch at base of pectoral fins
- Anal fin rounded; fins yellowish-orange
- Eye is orange or bronze

Similar Species: Other snappers

Habitat: Coastal waters, with adults in deeper water and juveniles in shallower areas

Size: Up to 30 inches (30 pounds)

Notes: Diet mainly consists of fishes



Yellowtail Snapper

Ocyurus chrysurus

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

- Olive to bluish back with yellow spots
- Yellow stripe on side, from mouth to tail, broadening toward rear
- Tail is yellow and deeply forked
- Lower sides and belly with narrow pink and yellow stripes
- No dark spot on side below dorsal fin

Similar Species: Other snappers

Habitat: Coastal waters, mainly near coral reefs

Size: Up to 30 inches (5 pounds)

Notes: Found mainly in tropical waters; spawn in mid-summer; feed on fishes and invertebrates



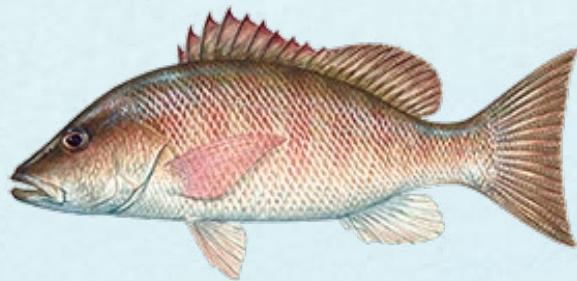
Gray Snapper (*Mangrove Snapper*, *Mango*, *Black Snapper*)

Lutjanus griseus

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

- Dark brown or gray in color, with red-orange spots in bars along the sides
- Two large canine teeth near front of upper jaw
- Anchor-shaped vomerine tooth patch (page 67)
- Dorsal fins with dark or reddish borders
- Young have dark stripe from snout, through eye, to upper edge of gill cover



Similar Species: Cubera snapper, *L. cyanopterus* (triangle-shaped tooth patch (page 67) and grow much larger than gray snapper); schoolmaster, *L. apodus* (yellow fins and faint white bars); and true black snapper, *A. dentatus* (rare in Florida; do not range north of the Florida Keys)

Habitat: Coastal waters near structure such as reefs, mangroves and seagrass; juveniles may enter freshwater

Size: Common to 24 inches (10 pounds)

Notes: Spawns June through August; feed on crustaceans and fishes

Cubera Snapper (Cuban Snapper)

Lutjanus cyanopterus

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Descriptions:

- Dark brown or gray in color, possibly with a red hue and pale bars on sides
- Triangle-shaped vomerine tooth patch (page 67)
- Thick, heavy lips
- Strong canine teeth found in both jaws, one pair visible when mouth closed



Similar Species: Gray snapper, *L. griseus* (has anchor-shaped tooth patch on roof of mouth)

Habitat: Coastal waters near structure; juveniles found in estuarine areas

Size: Up to 125 pounds and common to 40 pounds

Notes: Among largest snapper species; feed on fishes and crustaceans; spawn in the Keys during late summer

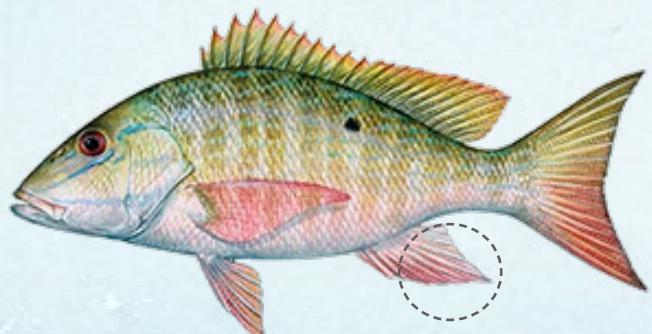
Mutton Snapper

Lutjanus analis

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

- Olive green color on back and upper sides, fading to a lighter belly
- Chevron-shaped vomerine tooth patch (page 67)
- Anal fin pointed
- Dark spot on side, just above lateral line
- Blue stripe below eye, following contour of gill cover
- Red hue on fins below the lateral line



Similar Species: Lane snapper, *L. synagris* (rounded anal fin)

Habitat: Coastal waters near structure

Size: Up to 30 inches (25 pounds)

Notes: Spawns in July and August; feed on fishes and invertebrates

Lane Snapper (Candy Snapper)

Lutjanus synagris

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

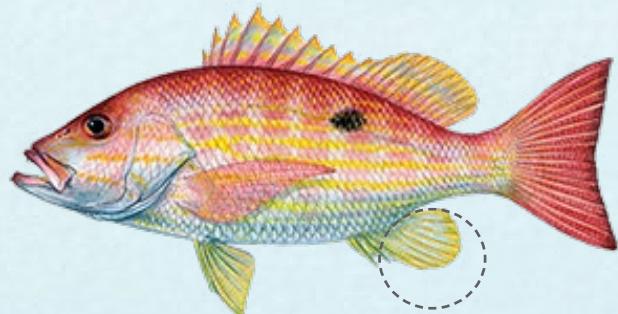
- Pinkish-red color on back, fading to a silvery belly
- 8 to 10 yellowish stripes on sides
- Anal fin rounded
- Dark spot on side, touching the lateral line, about as large as the eye
- Edge of tail trimmed in black

Similar Species: Mutton snapper, *L. analis* (has pointed anal fin)

Habitat: Coastal waters near structure

Size: Usually less than 14 inches (1 pound)

Notes: Spawns March to September; sexually mature at 6 inches long; feed on small fishes and invertebrates



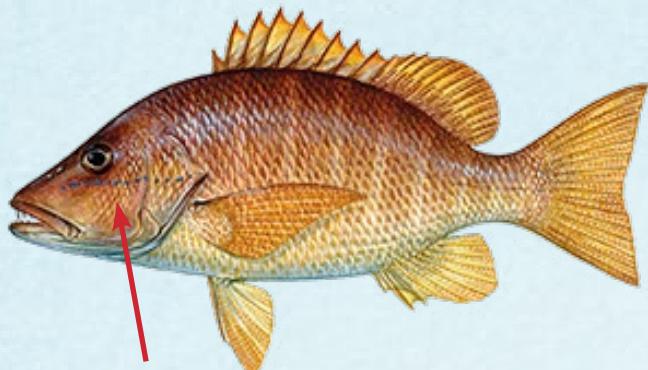
Schoolmaster

Lutjanus apodus

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

- Body is olive gray or brown with a yellow hue, fading to a lighter belly
- Fins are yellow
- Narrow white bars on sides, fading with age
- Blue stripe below eye, broken in adults
- Snout long and pointed
- Canine teeth enlarged in upper jaw, visible when mouth is closed



Similar Species: Dog snapper, *L. jocu* (has pale triangle below eye) and gray snapper, *L. griseus* (lack yellow fins and lack blue stripe below eyes)

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 24 inches (8 pounds); and common under 1 pound

Notes: Spawns in July and August; feed on fishes and invertebrates

Dog Snapper

Lutjanus jocu

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

- Olive brown color with a bronze tinge, lighter on sides
- Pale triangle and row of blue spots below the eye
- Canine teeth enlarged in upper jaw, visible when mouth is closed

Similar Species: Schoolmaster, *L. apodus* (lack white triangle below eye; fins are more yellow)

Habitat: Coastal waters near structure; juveniles found in estuaries

Size: Up to 36 inches (30 pounds)

Notes: Spawns from spring through fall; feed on fishes and invertebrates



Queen Snapper

Etelis oculatus

Family Lutjanidae, Snappers

Description:

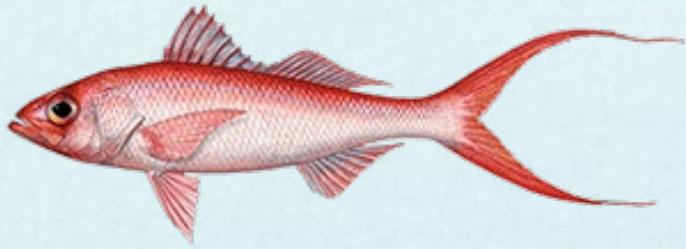
- Back and upper sides are red, fading to a lighter belly
- Large yellow eyes
- Tail is deeply forked
- Body is long and slender
- Dorsal fin with a notch in the middle
- No dark spot on side below dorsal fin

Similar Species: Other snappers

Habitat: Coastal waters over rocky reefs

Size: Up to 36 inches

Notes: Mainly consume small fishes and squid



Groupers and Sea Basses, Family Serranidae

Bank Sea Bass

Centropristes ocyurus

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Pale olive or brassy-brown on back, fading to a lighter belly
- Black blotches form dark bars on sides (darker blotch above pectoral fin)
- Head with wavy blue lines
- Lips are purplish-blue
- Adults have tail with three lobes
- Top of head (nape) lacks scales



Similar Species: Rock sea bass, *C. philadelphica* (has spot near middle of dorsal base and head is fully-scaled)

Habitat: Coastal waters over hard bottom areas

Size: Up to 12 inches

Notes: Feed on small fishes and invertebrates

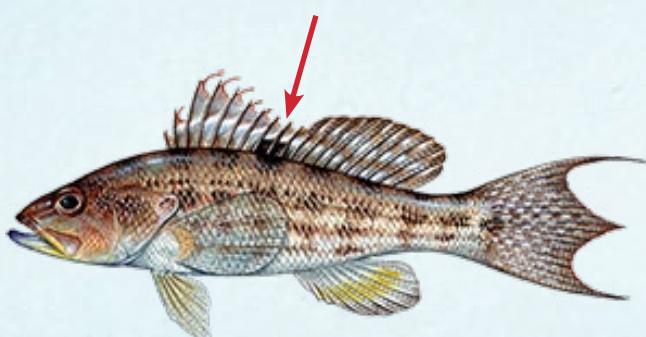
Rock Sea Bass

Centropristes philadelphica

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Olive-bronze on back, fading to a lighter belly
- Black blotches form vertical bars on sides
- Dark black spot near middle of dorsal fin base
- Tip of lower jaw is purple
- Head and fins with bright blue and orange markings
- Adults have tail with three lobes and elongated dorsal filaments
- Top of head (nape) is fully-scaled



Similar Species: Bank sea bass, *C. ocyurus* (lack spot near middle of dorsal fin base and nape lacks scales)

Habitat: Coastal waters over hard bottom areas; also found near sand or mud bottoms

Size: Rarely more than 10 inches in length

Notes: Spawn January through March

Black Sea Bass (Rock Bass, Rockfish)

Centropristes striata

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Body color dark brown or black
- Dorsal fin with stripes of white over black
- Large males have a fatty hump on head, in front of dorsal fin, as well as blue and ebony markings on body
- Females may have faint vertical bars
- Tail may have three lobes
- Adults have elongated ray on top part of tail
- Back edge of gill cover has a sharp spine



Similar Species: Other sea bass species

Habitat: Coastal waters near structure and rocky bottoms

Size: Up to 24 inches (8 pounds); common to 12 inches (1.5 pounds)

Notes: Spawn January through March; feed on small fishes and crustaceans

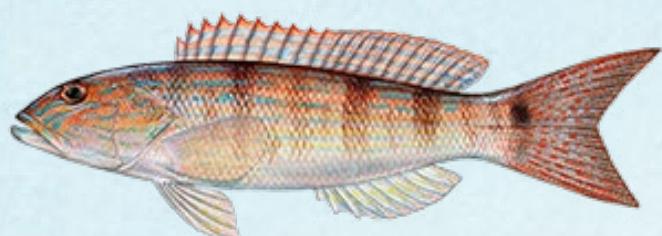
Sand Perch (Squirrelfish, Sand Sea Bass)

Diplectrum formosum

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Body and dorsal fins have dark-brown bars and orange and blue stripes
- Head has many blue lines
- Body is slender and cylindrical
- Preopercle (cheek) with spines radiating from two clusters
- Adults have elongated upper lobe of tail



Habitat: Coastal waters, including bays, seagrass beds and shallow banks

Size: Up to 12 inches

Notes: Despite their common name, sand perch are not “true” squirrelfishes

Yellowfin Grouper

Myxteroperca venenosa

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Body is greenish-olive or bright red
- Oval groups of dark spots form horizontal rows on the body
- Outer third of pectoral fins are bright yellow
- Small bright red spots are found on lower parts of large individuals



Similar Species: Black grouper, *M. bonaci*

(lacks bright yellow on outer third of pectoral fins)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters, typically near reefs; juveniles found in seagrass beds

Size: Common to 20 pounds

Notes: Feed on fishes and squid

Black Grouper

Mycteroperca bonaci

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

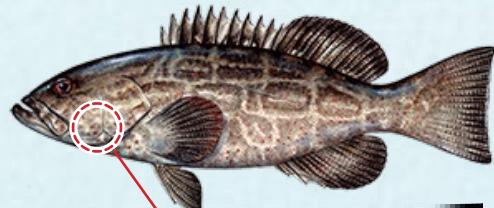
- Color olive or gray with rectangular black blotches and brassy spots
- Bottom of preopercle (cheek) is gently-rounded
- Second dorsal, anal and caudal fins black on outer third part of fin
- Pale yellow or white margin on pectoral fins

Similar Species: Gag, *M. microlepis* (spur on preopercle is serrated); and yellowfin grouper, *M. venenosa* (pectoral fins trimmed in bright yellow)

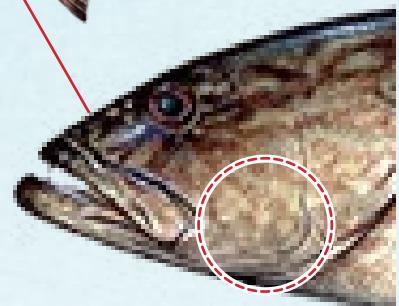
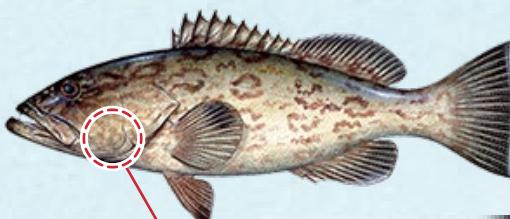
Habitat: Coastal waters near structure; juveniles can be found inshore

Size: Up to 48 inches (180 pounds); common to 40 pounds

Notes: Spawn between May and August; feed mainly on fishes



Gently-rounded preopercle



Gently-rounded preopercle

Nassau Grouper

Epinephelus striatus

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Body with brown or red-brown bars on sides and a light background
- Stripe on top of head in the shape of a tuning-fork
- No dots around the eyes
- Third spine of dorsal fin is longer than second spine
- Pelvic fins are shorter than pectoral fins
- Large black spot on caudal peduncle

Similar Species: Red grouper, *E. morio* (has tiny dark spots near eyes)

Habitat: Coastal waters; juveniles found nearshore and adults occur in deeper waters near structure; found mostly in south Florida

Size: Up to 36 inches (55 pounds); common under 10 pounds

Notes: Feed on fishes and invertebrates



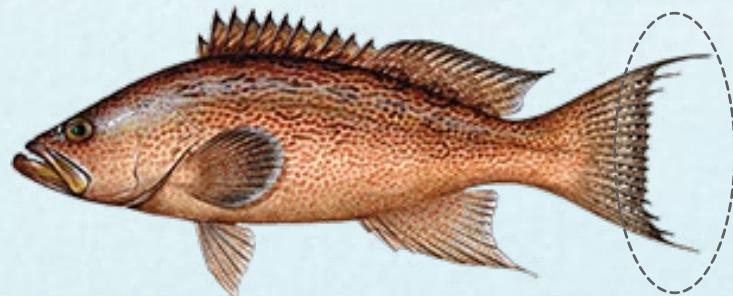
Scamp

Mycteroperca phenax

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Light gray or brown body
- Sides with dark or reddish-brown spots, often grouped into rosettes
- Upper and lower caudal fin rays elongated in adults
- Corners of mouth may have yellow coloration



Similar Species: Yellowmouth grouper, *M. interstitialis* (inside and corners of mouth are yellow)

Habitat: Nearshore and offshore reefs, ledges and rocky bottoms

Size: Common to 12 inches, but may reach up to 42 inches

Notes: Spawn in late spring; feed on small fishes and invertebrates

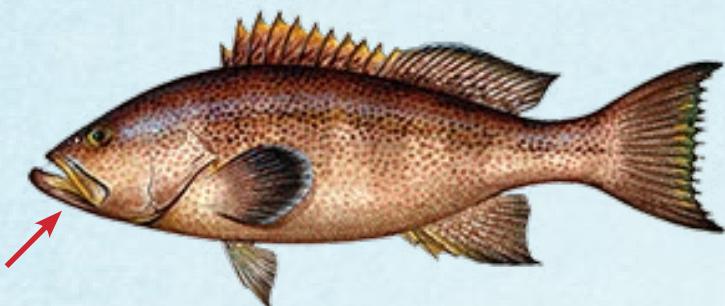
Yellowmouth Grouper

Mycteroperca interstitialis

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Tan or brown body, fading to a lighter belly
- Small, dark spots on top of head and over most of body
- Some yellow coloration around the eyes
- Outer edges of fins trimmed in white or light yellow
- Mouth is yellow at corners and inside



Similar Species: Scamp, *M. phenax* (elongated caudal fin rays; lacks yellow on inside and corners of mouth)

Habitat: Coastal and offshore waters near structure

Size: Up to 20 pounds

Notes: Feed on fishes

Red Grouper

Epinephelus morio

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Body color is brownish-red
- Tiny black dots found on snout
- Mouth lined in scarlet-orange color
- Sides have irregular white blotches
- Second spine of dorsal fin is long
- Pectoral fins are longer than pelvic fins
- No large black spot on caudal peduncle



Similar Species: Nassau grouper, *E. striatus* (large black spot on caudal peduncle)

Habitat: Bottom-dwelling fish found over hard and muddy bottoms

Size: Up to 42 inches (50 pounds); common to 20 inches (15 pounds)

Notes: Spawn in April and May; feed on a variety of fishes and invertebrates

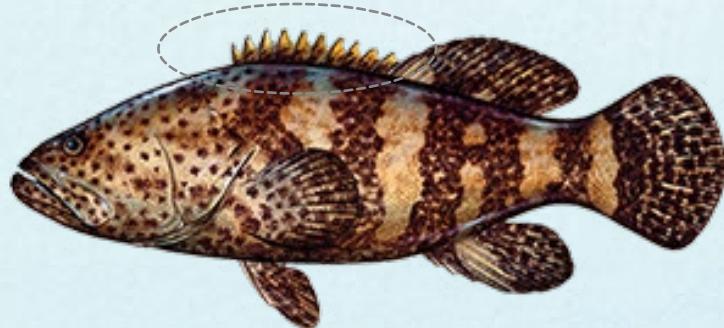
Goliath Grouper (Jewfish)

Epinephelus itajara

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Head and fins have tiny dark spots
- Irregular dark bars on the sides
- Eyes are small and set forward
- Caudal and pectoral fins are rounded
- First dorsal fin is much shorter than the second dorsal fin
- Dorsal spines low; all nearly the same height



Similar Species: Warsaw grouper, *H. nigritus* (dorsal spines at varying heights)

Habitat: Coastal and nearshore waters over structure or muddy bottoms; juveniles found in estuarine areas

Size: Up to 8 feet and 800 pounds; largest grouper species in western Atlantic waters

Notes: Spawn during summer months; feed on fishes and crustaceans

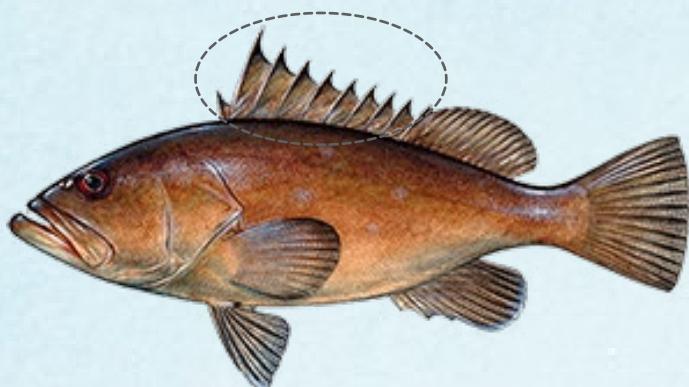
Warsaw Grouper

Hyporthodus nigritus

Family Serranidae, Groupers and Sea Basses

Description:

- Mottled dark reddish-brown or brownish-gray on back, fading to a lighter belly
- Uniformly colored; lacks distinctive markings
- Second dorsal fin spine very high (higher than the third spine)
- Caudal fin (tail) is squared-off
- Juveniles with yellowish caudal fin and dark spot on caudal peduncle



Similar Species: Goliath grouper, *E. itajara* (dorsal spines all at same height)

Habitat: Rocky bottoms in water over 200 feet deep; juveniles found inshore

Size: Up to 90 inches (580 pounds)

Notes: Feed on fishes and crustaceans

Grunts, Family Haemulidae

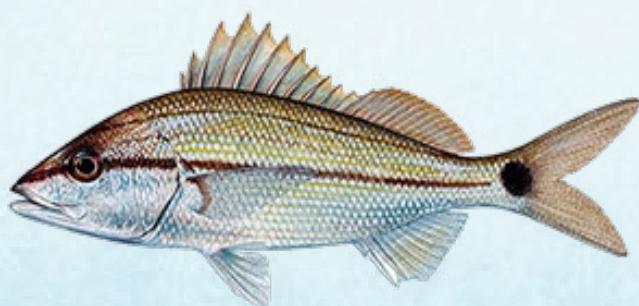
Tomtate (Brown Grunt)

Haemulon aurolineatum

Family Haemulidae, Grunts

Description:

- Gray to tan on back, fading to a white or silvery belly
- Yellow-brown stripe on side, extends from head to tail
- Black spot at base of tail (faded in larger individuals)
- Mouth lined with bright orange



Similar Species: Other grunt species

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 10 inches (1 pound)

Notes: Feed on invertebrates, plankton and algae

White Grunt (Key West Grunt)

Haemulon plumieri

Family Haemulidae, Grunts

Description:

- Light bluish-gray body with touches of bronze or yellow, fading to a white belly
- Horizontal, narrow blue stripes on head, ending at operculum
- Mouth is red and large
- Preopercle with black blotch

Similar Species: Other grunt species

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters; juveniles found inshore

Size: Up to 18 inches

Notes: Make a grunting noise by grinding pharyngeal teeth together; feed on small fishes and invertebrates



Pigfish (Grunt)

Orthopristis chrysoptera

Family Haemulidae, Grunts

Description:

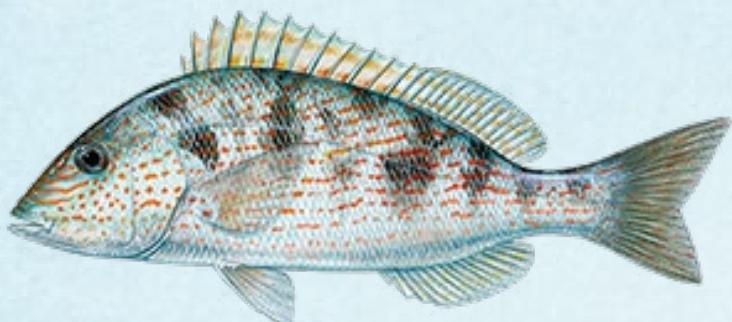
- Mottled light brown or gray body, often with a bluish tint
- Many small orange and blue markings on body
- Small mouth ends below front nostril

Similar Species: Pinfish, *L. rhomboides* (has incisor-like teeth; mouth ends behind front nostril); other grunt species

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 15 inches

Notes: Feed on small fishes and invertebrates



Porgies, Family Sparidae

Sheepshead (Convict Fish)

Archosargus probatocephalus

Family Sparidae, Porgies

Description:

- Body has lightly colored background with vertical black bars on sides
- Prominent teeth, including incisors, molars and rounded grinders
- No barbels on lower jaw
- Dorsal and anal fins with strong, sharp spines

Similar Species: Black drum, *P. cromis* (has chin barbels and lacks incisor-like teeth); and Atlantic spadefish, *C. faber* (lacks incisor-like teeth)

Habitat: Coastal waters near structure

Size: Up to 36 inches; common to 13 inches

Notes: Feed mainly on invertebrates



Red Porgy

Pagrus pagrus

Family Sparidae, Porgies

Description:

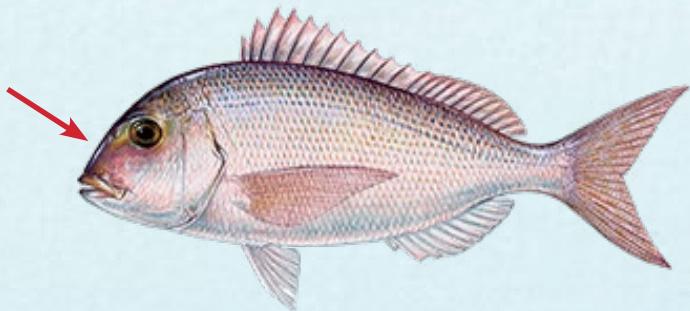
- Head and body color is pinkish-silver with several tiny blue spots
- Yellow coloration around eye and snout
- Only Florida porgy with a round rear nostril (not slit-like)
- Head rounded, not projecting

Similar Species: Other porgy species (have slit-like rear nostrils)

Habitat: Coastal waters over rocky or sandy bottoms

Size: Up to 36 inches

Notes: Feed on fishes and invertebrates



Jolthead Porgy

Calamus bajonado

Family Sparidae, Porgies

Description:

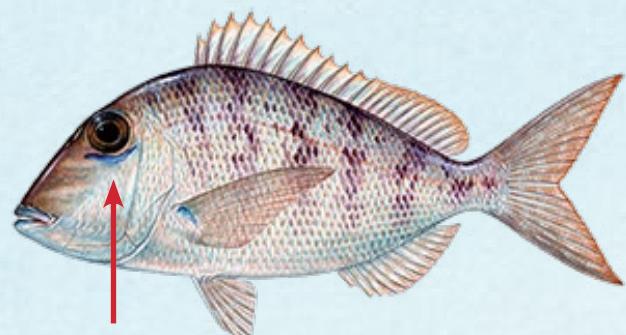
- Body is silvery to brassy in color, with a bluish tint
- Front of head is brown
- Head rounded, not projecting
- Blue line present below each eye
- Corner of mouth is orange

Similar Species: Red porgy, *P. pagrus* (has round rear nostrils); other porgy species

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 24 inches

Notes: Feed mainly on invertebrates



Knobbed Porgy (Key West Porgy)

Calamus nodosus

Family Sparidae, Porgies

Description:

- Deep-body that is silver with a reddish tint
- Front profile of head very steep
- Nape strongly projecting in adults
- Front of head is dark purplish-gray with yellowish-bronze spots
- Base of pectoral fin has large blue spot

Similar Species: Littlehead porgy, *C. proridens* (has many wavy, dark blue lines on snout)

Habitat: Coastal waters over hard bottoms

Size: Up to 21 inches

Notes: Feed mainly on invertebrates



Littlehead Porgy

Calamus proridens

Family Sparidae, Porgies

Description:

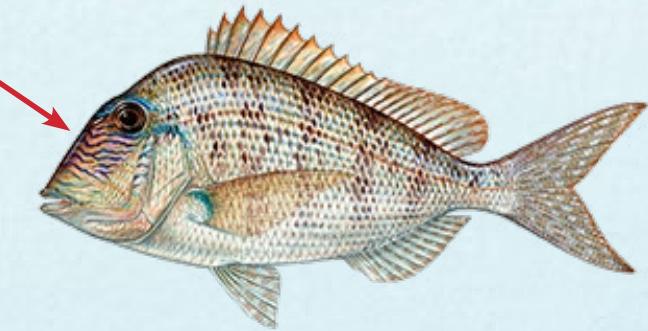
- Body is silvery, with faint bluish lines along scale rows
- Areas between bluish lines can be brassy in color
- Many wavy, dark blue lines present on snout and cheek

Similar Species: Knobbed porgy, *C. nodosus* (lacks dark blue lines on snout)

Habitat: Coastal waters over hard bottoms

Size: Up to 18 inches

Notes: Feed mainly on invertebrates



Grass Porgy

Calamus arctifrons

Family Sparidae, Porgies

Description:

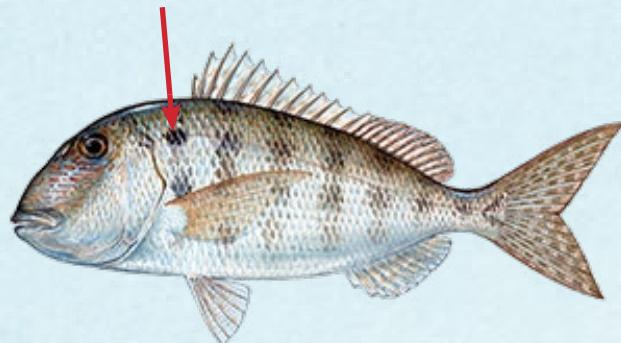
- Body is pale tan to silver, with a dark-olive back
- Dark bar goes through eye to corner of mouth
- Dark blotches on sides resemble bars and stripes
- Prominent dark spot near beginning of lateral line
- Dark V-shaped patch of color at base of caudal fin

Similar Species: Jolthead porgy, *C. bajonado* (has blue line below eye); other porgy species

Habitat: Coastal waters in seagrass beds

Size: Up to 10 inches

Notes: Feed mainly on invertebrates



Pinfish

Lagodon rhomboides

Family Sparidae, Porgies

Description:

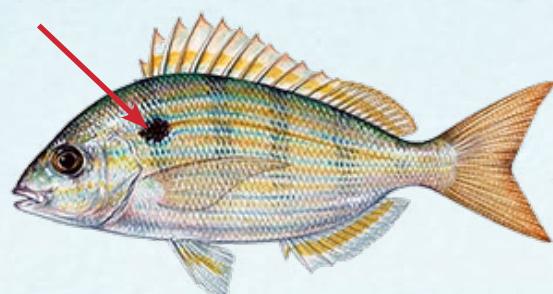
- Body silvery, with blue and yellow stripes and yellow fins
- Large, dark spot behind the gill cover
- Mouth is small with incisor-like teeth
- Sharp spines on dorsal and anal fins

Similar Species: Spottail pinfish, *D. holbrookii* (has dark spot on caudal peduncle); pigfish, *O. chrysoptera* (no incisor-like teeth; mouth ends below front nostril)

Habitat: Coastal waters near structure; may enter freshwater

Size: Usually less than 8 inches

Notes: Feed on small fishes and invertebrates; popular live bait



Spottail Pinfish

Diplodus holbrookii

Family Sparidae, Porgies

Description:

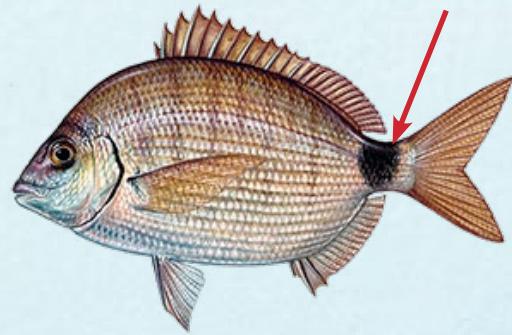
- Back is brownish, fading to a lighter belly
- Eight faint bars on sides (more visible in juveniles)
- Large, dark spot on caudal peduncle
- Edge of gill opening is lined with dark color

Similar Species: Pinfish, *L. rhomboides* (lacks large black spot on caudal peduncle)

Habitat: Coastal waters with vegetated bottoms

Size: Up to 18 inches

Notes: Feed mainly on invertebrates



Drums, Family Sciaenidae

Atlantic Croaker

Micropogonias undulatus

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

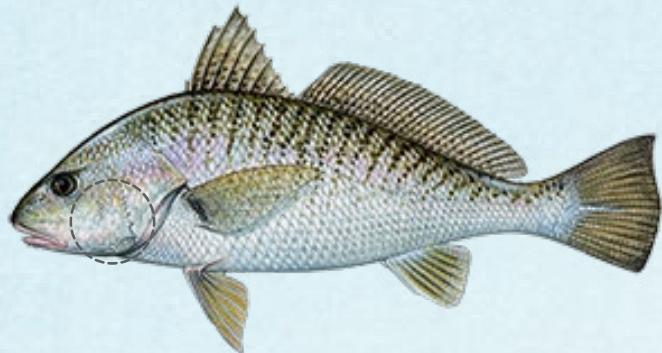
- Body is silvery-gray or bronze, iridescent on head
- Indistinct wavy bars or lines on upper sides
- Strongly serrated preopercle (bone on cheek)
- Small barbels on lower jaw

Similar Species: Spot, *L. xanthurus* (caudal fin is forked and preopercle is smooth)

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 20 inches (4 pounds)

Notes: Spawn offshore in the fall; feed on fishes and invertebrates



Spot

Leiostomus xanthurus

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

- Back is bluish-brown, fading to brassy sides and a silvery-white belly
- Dark spot behind gill cover
- Only drum in Florida with a forked caudal fin (tail)
- Upper sides have 12 to 15 dark diagonal lines

Similar Species: Atlantic croaker, *M. undulatus* (has strongly serrated preopercle)

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 14 inches

Notes: Feeds on invertebrates and decaying material



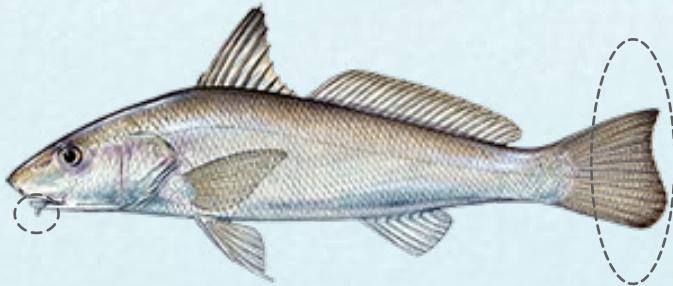
Gulf Kingfish (Whiting)

Menticirrhus littoralis

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

- Body is silvery all over, without dark marks
- First dorsal fin tip is often dusky-brown
- Caudal fin (tail) has a blackish tip
- Scales on underside are smaller than body scales
- Barbel on lower jaw



Similar Species: Southern kingfish, *M. americanus* (caudal fin lacks a blackish tip); and northern kingfish, *M. saxatilis* (distinct "V" mark above pectoral fins)

Habitat: Coastal waters; common in surf zones along beaches

Size: Up to 18 inches

Notes: Feed on fishes and invertebrates

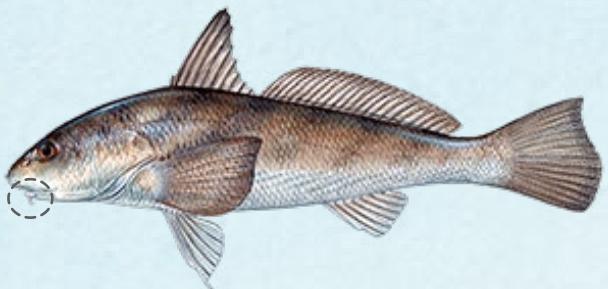
Southern Kingfish (Whiting)

Menticirrhus americanus

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

- Back is grayish-brown, fading to silvery sides and belly
- 7 to 8 indistinct diagonal dark blotches on sides
- Scales on underside are nearly the same size as body scales
- Barbel on lower jaw



Similar Species: Gulf kingfish, *M. littoralis* (caudal fin has blackish tip); and northern kingfish, *M. saxatilis* (distinct "V" mark above pectoral fins)

Habitat: Coastal waters; common in surf zones along beaches

Size: Up to 19 inches

Notes: Feed on fishes and invertebrates

Black Drum

Pogonias cromis

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

- Back is highly-arched and gray or black, fading to a lighter belly
- Juveniles have 4 to 6 dark vertical bars on sides (fade with age)
- Barbels on lower jaw
- Large scales
- Powerful pharyngeal teeth used to crush oysters and other shellfish



Similar Species: Red drum, *S. ocellatus*; and sheepshead, *A. probatocephalus* (both lack barbels on lower jaw)

Habitat: Coastal waters; juveniles found in estuaries

Size: Up to 67 inches

Notes: Largest drum species; spawn nearshore in winter and early spring; feed on fishes and invertebrates

Red Drum (Redfish)

Sciaenops ocellatus

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

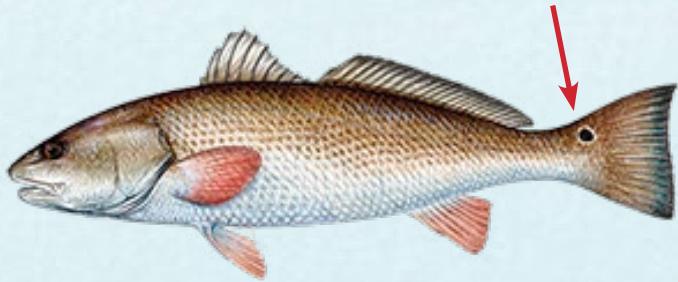
- Body is copper-bronze, fading to a lighter belly
- One or more dark, ocellated spots at base of tail (occasionally without spot)
- Lack barbels on lower jaw
- Large scales
- Powerful pharyngeal teeth used to crush oysters and other shellfish

Similar Species: Black drum, *P. cromis* (has chin barbels and lacks spot on tail)

Habitat: Coastal waters

Size: Up to 61 inches

Notes: Move from inshore waters to nearshore waters at about 30 inches in length (4 years of age); spawn in nearshore waters from August to November; feed on fishes and invertebrates



Silver Perch

Bairdiella chrysoura

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

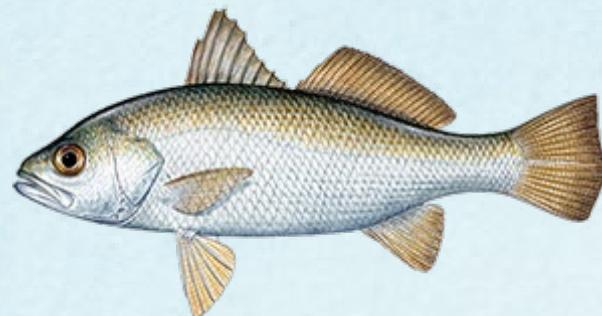
- Silvery or greenish-blue back, fading to silvery-yellow sides and belly
- Fins are yellow or dusky
- 5 to 6 chin pores
- Finely serrated preopercle (cheek bone)
- Lacks spots, large canine teeth and barbels on lower jaw

Similar Species: Sand seatrout, *C. arenarius* (has canine teeth and lacks chin pores)

Habitat: Coastal waters; may enter freshwater

Size: Up to 12 inches

Notes: Feed on invertebrates and small fishes



Sand Seatrout (White Trout)

Cynoscion arenarius

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

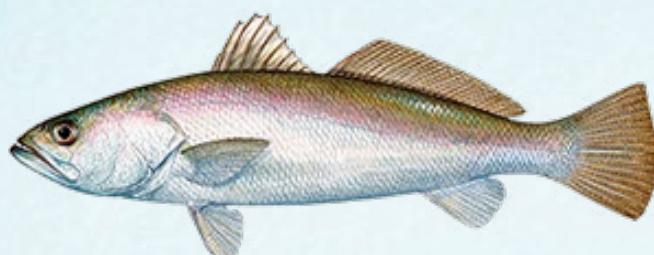
- Body is pale with a tan or yellowish back, fading to a silver or white belly
- Pair of large canine teeth at tip of upper jaw
- Inside of mouth is yellow
- 10-12 soft anal fin rays
- Lacks dark spots on back and barbels on lower jaw

Similar Species: Silver seatrout, *C. nothus* (more silvery color and smaller size); silver perch, *B. chrysoura* (has chin pores and lacks canine teeth); and weakfish, *C. regalis* (upper sides have wavy lines of small, irregular spots)

Habitat: Coastal waters over sand bottoms in the Gulf of Mexico (rare in Atlantic waters)

Size: Usually less than 15 inches (1 pound)

Notes: Feed mainly on small fishes and shrimp



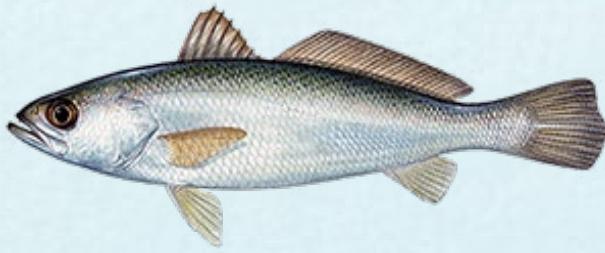
Silver Seatrout (White Trout)

Cynoscion nothus

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

- Grayish back, silvery sides and white belly
- Faint rows of spots may be present on upper sides
- All fins are pale yellow, except for the darker, dusky dorsal fin
- Pair of large canine teeth at tip of upper jaw
- Eyes large and snout short
- 8 to 9 soft anal fin rays
- Bottom half of tail more elongated than upper half



Similar Species: Sand seatrout, *C. arenarius* (more yellow color and larger size)

Habitat: Coastal waters over sand or sandy mud bottoms

Size: Usually less than 10 inches (1 pound)

Notes: Smallest seatrout species; feed mainly on small fishes and shrimp

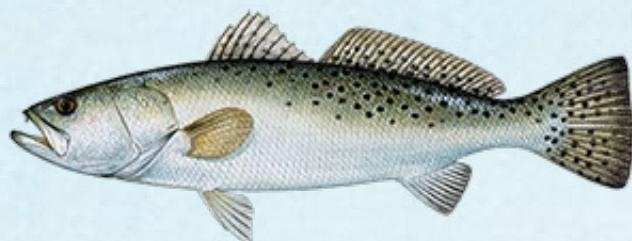
Spotted Seatrout (Speckled Trout)

Cynoscion nebulosus

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

- Back is dark gray or green, fading to a silvery or white belly
- Several black spots on back extend to dorsal fins and tail
- Pair of large canine teeth at tip of upper jaw
- Lack barbels on lower jaw



Similar Species: Weakfish, *C. regalis* (has irregular wavy lines instead of spots)

Habitat: Coastal waters over sand bottoms or seagrass beds

Size: Up to 39 inches (17 pounds); common to 14 inches

Notes: Spawn inshore from March through November; feed mainly on small fishes and shrimp

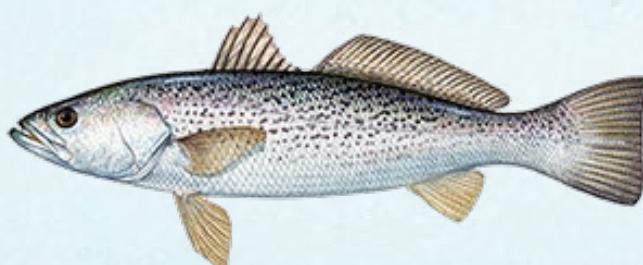
Weakfish

Cynoscion regalis

Family Sciaenidae, Drums

Description:

- Back is dark olive or blue-green, fading to silvery sides and belly
- Upper sides have wavy lines of small, irregular, dark spots
- Pelvic and anal fins yellowish, other fins more pale
- Pair of large canine teeth at tip of upper jaw
- Tip of tongue colored with black
- Lack barbels on lower jaw



Similar Species: Spotted seatrout, *C. nebulosus* (has prominent spots); silver seatrout, *C. nothus* (bottom half of tail is longer than upper half); and sand seatrout, *C. arenarius* (lacks dark spots)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters of the Atlantic (typically not in the Gulf of Mexico); juveniles found in estuaries

Size: Common to 20 inches

Notes: Spawn nearshore between April and October; feed mainly on fishes and crustaceans

Mackerels and Tunas, Family Scombridae

Cero

Scomberomorus regalis

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

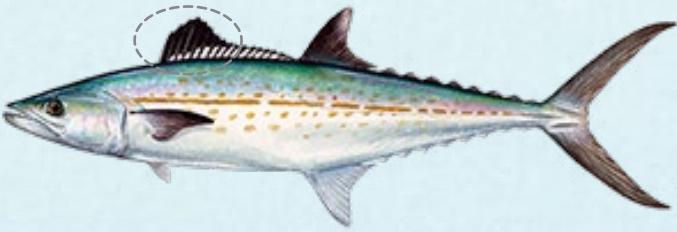
- Back is bluish-green, fading to silvery sides and belly
- Sides with silvery-yellow spots, some forming broken lines
- Yellowish stripe on side extends from pectoral fin to caudal fin
- Bluish-black blotch on front of first dorsal fin
- Lateral line slopes gently from behind the gill cover to the tail

Similar Species: Spanish mackerel, *S. maculatus* (lack yellowish stripe on sides); and king mackerel, *S. cavalla* (lateral line drops sharply below second dorsal fin)

Habitat: Coastal waters, especially over coral reefs and other structure

Size: Up to 36 inches

Notes: Spawn offshore in mid-summer; feed on small fishes and invertebrates



Spanish Mackerel

Scomberomorus maculatus

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

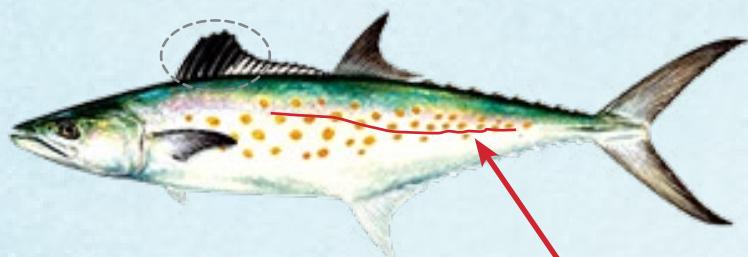
- Back is bluish-green, fading to silvery sides and belly
- Irregular golden-yellow spots on sides
- Bluish-black blotch on front of first dorsal fin
- Lateral line slopes gently from behind the gill cover to the tail

Similar Species: Cero, *S. regalis* (has yellowish stripe on sides); and king mackerel, *S. cavalla* (lateral line drops sharply below second dorsal fin)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters

Size: Up to 36 inches

Notes: Spawn offshore from spring through summer; feed on small fishes and invertebrates



King Mackerel (Kingfish)

Scomberomorus cavalla

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

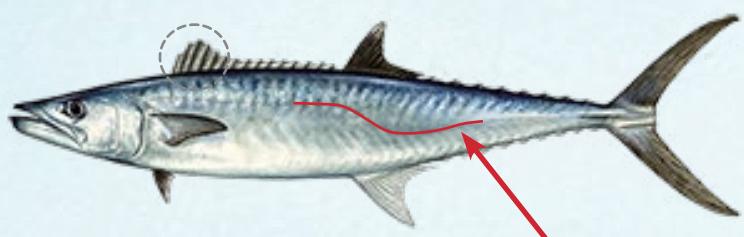
- Back is bluish-green, fading to silvery sides and belly (no spots)
- Front of first dorsal fin lacks a dark blotch
- Lateral line drops sharply below the second dorsal fin
- Juveniles may have yellowish spots, similar to Spanish mackerel

Similar Species: Cero, *S. regalis*; Spanish mackerel, *S. maculatus* (both have gently sloping lateral lines and a dark blotch on front of first dorsal fin); and wahoo, *A. solandri* (first dorsal fin long and continuous)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters

Size: Up to 72 inches

Notes: Spawn offshore in mid-summer; feed mainly on fishes



Wahoo

Acanthocybium solandri

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

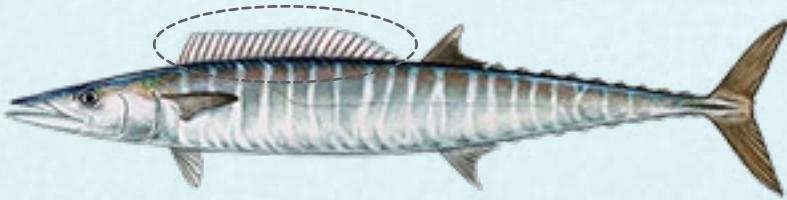
- Slender body with a dark bluish-green back, silvery sides and a whitish belly
- 24 to 30 wavy, dark blue bars on sides
- Jaws elongated, forming a pointed beak with triangular finely-serrated teeth
- First dorsal fin is low and long

Similar Species: King mackerel, *S. cavalla* (lateral line drops sharply)

Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Up to 98 inches

Notes: Feed on fishes and squid



Little Tunny (Bonito, Blue Bonito)

Euthynnus alletteratus

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

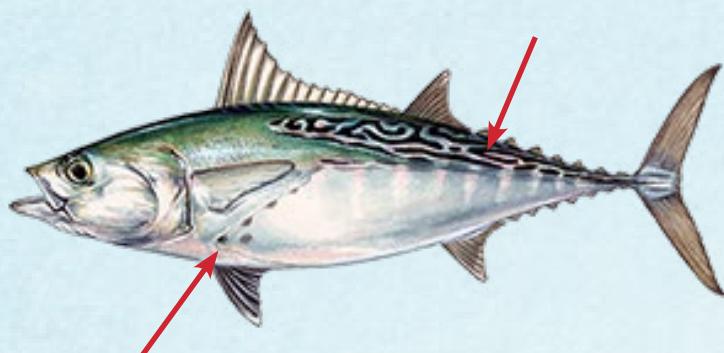
- Broken, wavy, diagonal dark stripes on back
- 3 to 7 dark spots under each pectoral fin
- Lack dark stripes on belly
- Relatively short pectoral fins

Similar Species: Atlantic bonito, *S. sarda* (lack spots below pectoral fin; dark stripes on back are mostly straight)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters

Size: Up to 48 inches

Notes: One of the most common tuna species in our area; feed on small fishes and invertebrates



Atlantic Bonito (True Bonito, Northern Bonito)

Sarda sarda

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

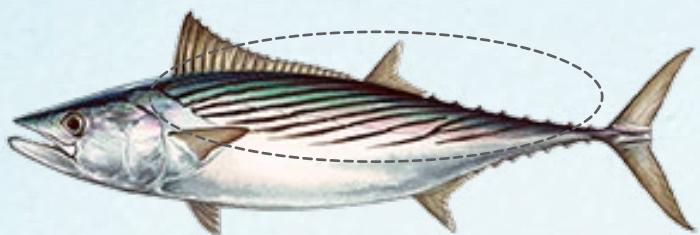
- Mostly straight, diagonal stripes on back
- Dark blue color on back and upper sides
- Lack dark stripes on belly
- Relatively short pectoral fins

Similar Species: Little tunny, *E. alletteratus* (wavy dark stripes on back; 4 to 5 dark spots below pectoral fin); and skipjack tuna, *K. pelamis* (stripes on lower sides, not on back)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters of the Atlantic Ocean (rarely found in the Gulf)

Size: Up to 36 inches

Notes: Feed on small fishes and invertebrates



Skipjack Tuna (Oceanic Bonito)

Katsuwonus pelamis

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

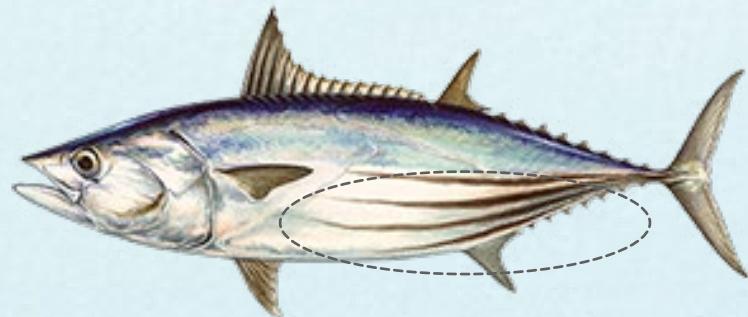
- Back is dark purplish-blue, fading to silvery lower sides and belly
- 4 to 6 horizontal stripes on lower part of sides
- Relatively short pectoral fins

Similar Species: Little tunny, *E. alletteratus*; and Atlantic bonito, *S. sarda* (both have stripes on back, not on lower sides)

Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Up to 43 inches

Notes: Feed on fishes and invertebrates



Yellowfin Tuna

Thunnus albacares

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

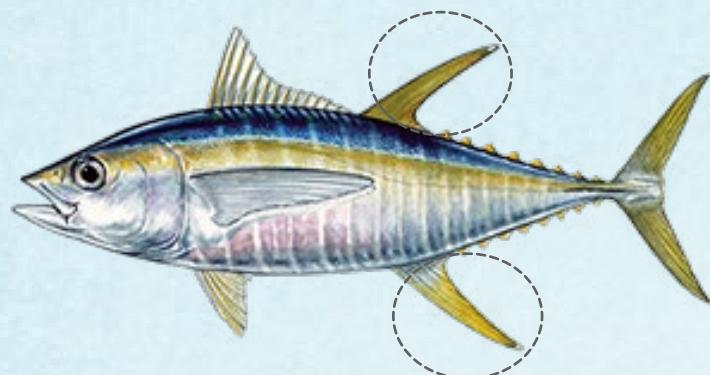
- Second dorsal and anal fins very elongated (about 1/5 of total length)
- Second dorsal fin and all finlets are yellow and may be trimmed in black
- Golden-yellow stripe on sides
- Long pectoral fin reaches below the beginning of the second dorsal fin

Similar Species: Blackfin tuna, *T. atlanticus* (lacks elongated second dorsal and anal fins)

Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Common to 60 inches

Notes: Spawning peaks in the summer; feed on fishes and invertebrates



Blackfin Tuna

Thunnus atlanticus

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

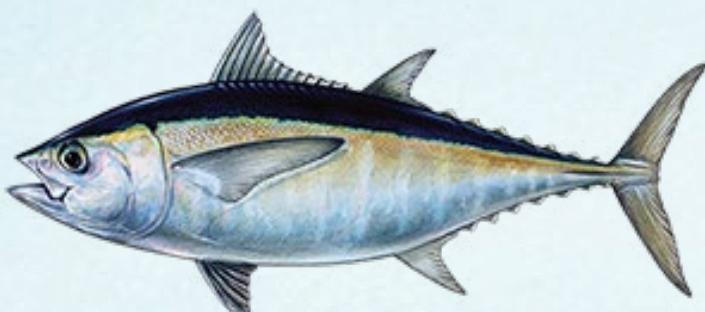
- Second dorsal and anal fins not elongated
- Bronze stripe on sides
- Second dorsal fin dusky and all finlets dark with white edges
- Long pectoral fin nearly reaches below the beginning of the second dorsal fin

Similar Species: Yellowfin tuna, *T. albacares* (elongated second dorsal and anal fins); and bluefin tuna, *T. thynnus* (has short pectoral fins and reaches a much larger size)

Habitat: Coastal to offshore waters

Size: Common to 28 inches

Notes: Feed on small fishes, invertebrates and plankton



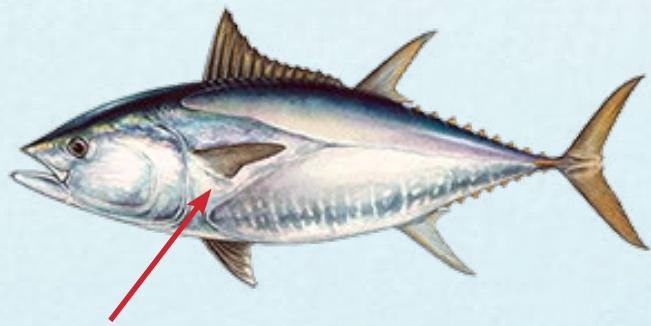
Bluefin Tuna

Thunnus thynnus

Family Scombridae, Mackerels and Tunas

Description:

- Back is dark blue-black, fading to a silvery-white belly
- Second dorsal and anal fins not elongated
- Short pectoral fin does not reach area between first and second dorsal fins
- First dorsal fin is yellow or blue and the second dorsal fin is reddish-brown
- Anal fin and all finlets bright yellow with black edges
- Lack distinct body streaks, stripes and spots



Similar Species: Blackfin tuna, *T. atlanticus* (has long pectoral fins and reaches much smaller size)

Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Common to 78 inches; largest tuna species

Notes: Feed on fishes, squid and occasionally crustaceans

Swordfishes, Family Xiphiidae

Swordfish

Xiphias gladius

Family Xiphiidae, Swordfishes

Description:

- Back dark brown to purple, fading to a lighter belly
- Long, wide, flat and sword-like upper jaw
- First dorsal fin is very high, rigid and short
- Single keel on each side of caudal peduncle
- Lack pelvic fins, scales and teeth
- Eyes large



Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Up to 15 feet (1400 pounds)

Notes: Feed primarily on fishes, but may also consume invertebrates

Billfishes, Family Istiophoridae

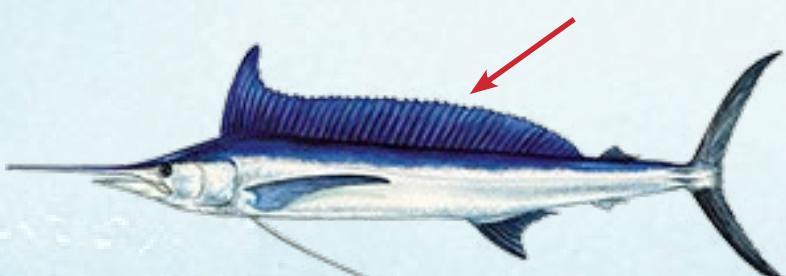
Longbill Spearfish

Tetrapturus pfluegeri

Family Istiophoridae, Billfishes

Description:

- Dark blue back, white and brown sides, fading to a silvery-white belly
- Dorsal fin dark blue, other fins dark brown-black
- First dorsal fin peaks at front, then dips slightly, but remains somewhat high
- Upper jaw elongated into a spear shape



Similar Species: White marlin, *K. albida* (dorsal fin raised in front, then becomes very low)

Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Up to 8 feet (120 pounds)

Notes: Feed mainly on fishes and squid

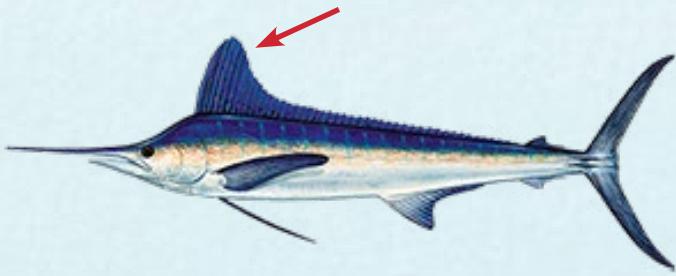
White Marlin

Kajikia albida

Family Istiophoridae, Billfishes

Description:

- Body dark blue to brown, fading to a silvery-white belly
- Dorsal fin dark blue with noticeable black spots
- Tips of first dorsal, pectoral and first anal fins are rounded
- Upper jaw elongated into a spear shape
- Scales with a single sharp point
- Lateral line curves over the pectoral fin



Similar Species: Blue marlin, *M. nigricans* (dorsal fin pointed and lacks spots; tips of pectoral and anal fins pointed); and longbill spearfish, *T. pfluegeri* (dorsal fin raised in front, then dips slightly, but remains somewhat high)

Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Up to 9.5 feet (180 pounds)

Notes: Feed mainly on fishes and squid

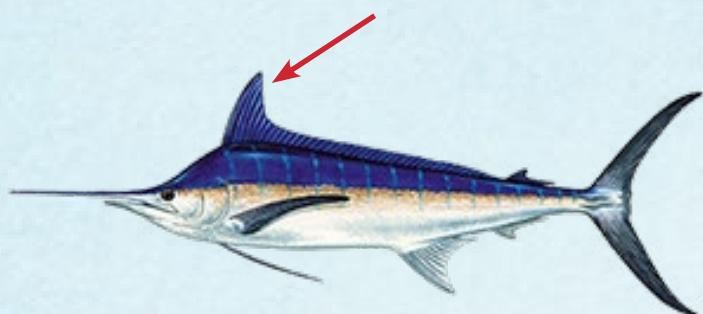
Blue Marlin

Makaira nigricans

Family Istiophoridae, Billfishes

Description:

- Back is blue-black, fading to a silvery-white belly
- Tips of dorsal, pectoral and anal fins are pointed
- Lack black spots on dorsal fin
- Upper jaw elongated into a spear shape
- Scales with one or two sharp points
- Lateral line is interwoven like a net, hard to see in large individuals



Similar Species: White marlin, *K. albida* (dorsal fin rounded with noticeable spots; tip of pectoral and anal fins rounded)

Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Up to 16 feet (1400 pounds); largest Atlantic marlin species

Notes: Feed mainly on fishes and squid

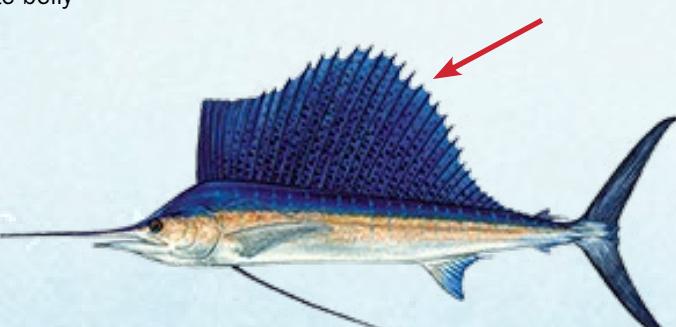
Sailfish

Istiophorus platypterus

Family Istiophoridae, Billfishes

Description:

- Dark blue back, brownish-blue sides, fading to a silvery-white belly
- First dorsal fin is greatly enlarged and sail-like, has black spots, squared-off in front and is highest in the middle
- Pelvic fins are extremely long and narrow
- Upper jaw elongated into a spear shape
- Scales with blunt ends
- Lateral line curves over the pectoral fin



Similar Species: White marlin, *K. albida*; and juvenile blue marlin, *M. nigricans* (both lack the large sail-like dorsal fin of sailfish)

Habitat: Offshore waters

Size: Up to 11 feet (220 pounds)

Notes: Feed mainly on fishes and invertebrates