

PELAGIC and NON-PELAGIC ROCKFISH

Rockfish are divided into two groups, **pelagic** and **non-pelagic**, for purposes of sport fishery management. Bag and possession limits differ for the two groups in many areas, so it is important to be able to distinguish them. This chart shows the most common species in each group.

Pelagic Rockfish

Open-water species often found mid-water in schools, close to rocky structures. Moderately long-lived (most fish are 7-30 years old).



BLACK ROCKFISH—often misnamed “black bass”:
Dark gray to black with white belly. Usually uniform in color, but may have lighter patches along back. No pores on lower jaw.
Size: up to 25 inches.



YELLOWTAIL ROCKFISH:—
Olive green to greenish brown with lighter underside; fins distinctly yellowish green.
Size: up to 26 inches.



DUSKY ROCKFISH:—
Brownish body color with whitish belly, tinged with pink or orange; fins tinged with pink or orange; more common in deep water. Three pores on each side of lower jaw, and two dark bars on each cheek.
Size: up to 20 inches.

Non-Pelagic Rockfish

Bottom-dwelling species found on or near the ocean floor, usually in rocky or boulder-strewn habitat. Extremely long-lived (most fish are 15-75 years old).



YELLOWEYE ROCKFISH
(red snapper): Orange red and orange yellow, bright golden yellow eye, fins may be black at tips. Juveniles have two light bands along the side, one on the lateral line and a smaller one below the lateral line. Size: up to 36 inches.



COPPER ROCKFISH:—
Olive brown to copper with pink or yellow blotches, white on sides and belly. Dorsal fins dark copper brown to black with some white. Rear two-thirds of lateral line is light.
Size: up to 22 inches.



SILVERGRAY ROCKFISH:—
Greenish to silver-gray body, belly white tinged with soft orange or pink. Slender body fish with a long lower jaw protruding well beyond upper jaw.
Size: up to 28 inches.



TIGER ROCKFISH:—
Light pink with five dark red stripes along the side. Two dark bars extend from each eye.
Size: up to 24 inches.



CHINA ROCKFISH:—
Mostly black, with bright yellow and white blotches and a yellow stripe along most of the lateral line.
Size: up to 17 inches.



QUILLBACK ROCKFISH:—
Brown body mottled with orange and yellow. Long, prominent spines on a high dorsal fin.
Size: up to 24 inches.

Rockfish Require Special Management

Rockfish are one of the more interesting and colorful groups of marine fishes. There are over 30 species in Alaska; about a dozen are commonly taken in sport fisheries. As a group, they are more vulnerable to harvest than most other fishes because (1) they prefer specific habitats and are easily found and caught, (2) they may not reproduce until they are 7 to 30 years old, (3) survival of young is extremely low and varies a lot from year to year, and (4) catch and release mortality is very high.

Rockfish have swim bladders, organs containing gas that are used to regulate buoyancy. Their swim bladders are not vented, so when they are brought to the surface from deep water the gas expands, causing internal injuries. Rockfish with inflated swim bladders cannot re-submerge and usually don't survive release if brought up from depths exceeding 60 ft. Even apparently uninjured rockfish may have internal organ and blood vessel damage. Avoid high-relief rocky areas and the deeper sides of rock piles and pinnacles if you don't want to catch rockfish. In some areas you must retain non-pelagic rockfish you catch. We do not recommend using knives or syringes to deflate the swim bladder.

For more information on rockfish, go to

<http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/RockfishBrochure.cfm>