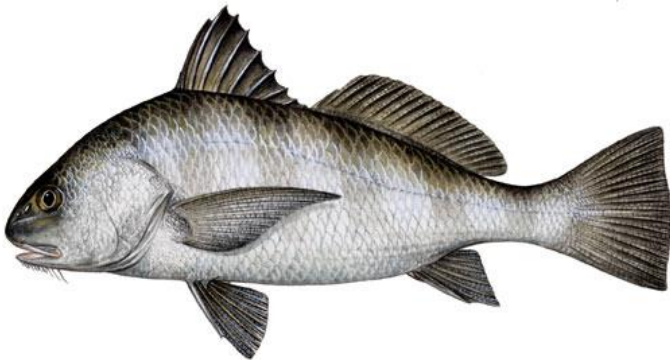




Black Drum



Black drum, *Pogonias cromis* are large, beautiful fish that occur from the Gulf of Maine to Florida, throughout the Gulf of Mexico, and as far south as Argentina. Black drum are long lived, reaching ages of nearly 60 years on the Atlantic coast and about 45 years on the Gulf coast.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION - Black drum are large fish that can reach sizes over 46 inches in length and 120 pounds. Their body profile is oblong with an elevated back, and deeply notched dorsal fin. Black drum have a distinctive, blunt snout, and several short barbels that line their chin and aid in feeding.

Black drum have teeth in the pharyngeal arch of their throat (the part of the throat that is behind the mouth and nasal cavity, and above the esophagus). These teeth are used to crush their favorite foods, hard shelled crustaceans and mollusks.

Coloration of black drum can change with age or habitat. Adults are silvery to black in color with a copper or brassy sheen. Black drum in bays and lagoons tend to be darker and often have a bronze upper surface with gray to white sides. Young black drum have 4-6 vertical black bars along their sides. These fade as the fish ages.

Black drum are the largest members of the family Sciaenidae (sigh-EE-nih-dee), which includes drums and croakers. Sciaenids are known to have the ability to produce a "croaking" or "drumming" sound. To produce the sound, sciaenids possess special red muscles called sonic muscle fibers that vibrate against the swim bladder. Drumming can be used for a variety of reasons, but most notably it is used for spawning.

Did you know?

The black drum's scientific name is *Pogonias cromis*. What does it mean? Well, *Pogonias* means bearded, referring to a black drum's barbels, and *cromis* means to croak. Put that together and black drum are bearded croakers.

REPRODUCTION AND GROWTH - Female black drum mature around 4-6 years in age. Males mature earlier and at smaller sizes.

Black drum spawn both in nearshore waters and in the estuary. Spawning takes place from late fall through early spring in the evening hours. Black drum are multiple spawners and are capable of spawning every three days during the spawning season.

During spawning black drum produce high intensity sounds that are associated with courtship and spawning. These sounds are loud enough to be heard from a boat and even a waterfront home.

Studies that have examined black drum sound production have found that while some black drum produce sound occasionally during the day, the intensity of the black drum chorus increases sharply from late afternoon to

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early evening and lasts up to 12 hours during the peak spawning season from January through March.

Black drum are highly productive, spawning 20 to 30 times during a single season. In fact, each spawning season, an average sized black drum female can produce around 32 million eggs.

Black drum eggs are free floating and hatch in less than 24 hours. When they hatch, larvae are less than a tenth of an inch in size. By the time they are two-thirds of an inch in size, their body form resembles that of an adult black drum.

Studies that evaluated black drum growth in Texas determined that they grow to about 6 inches in their first year, 12 inches in their second year, and 16 inches in their third year. After that they add about 2 inches in length per year. After 15 years of life, black drum growth slows.

HABITAT PREFERENCES - Newly hatched larvae rely on tidal currents to transport them to their preferred nutrient rich, muddy water nursery habitats inside tidal creeks and canals. Interestingly, black drum less than three quarters of an inch in length already have visible barbels for feeding along their muddy bottom nursery habitat.

As black drum grow their habitat preferences change with adults' preferring bare bottom areas in shallow water, particularly areas with high water movement and oyster reefs.

The salinity range of black drum is very broad but generally older fish tend to migrate towards saltier water. Older black drum are also known to move offshore where they form large schools that can migrate over large distances.

FEEDING HABITS - Black drum are primarily bottom feeders, although occasionally, they have been observed feeding on small finfish at the surface. Young black drum feed mostly on very tiny invertebrates whereas larger black drum feed on larger mollusks, crabs, and shrimps.

Black drum feed by swimming with their heads slightly lowered, and gliding their barbels over potential food items. When food is found, black drum stop swimming and inhale the food item by creating a suction with the gill covers and mouth. Feeding schools of black drum often dredge up the bottom, creating muddy plumes that can easily be seen from above.

PREDATORS - Black drum larvae are preyed upon by jellyfish and comb jellies. As they get larger, juveniles are prey for other fish such as spotted sea trout and crevalle jack, and adults are likely prey for sharks.

PATHOGENS AND PARASITES - The most common parasite found in black drum are larval spaghetti worms. Spaghetti worms are common parasites of all saltwater drum species, which include spotted seatrout, redfish, croakers, and black drum.

While spaghetti worms all look alike to most fishermen, several different worm species use these fish as hosts. *Poecilancistrum caryophyllum* is the most common spaghetti worm in spotted seatrout; however, spaghetti worms found in black drum are most often *Pseudogrillotia pleistacantha*.

MANAGEMENT - In Florida, Black drum are managed for both recreational and commercial harvest. Size limits, bag limits and gear restrictions apply. For detailed information visit: <http://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/>.

BEST BLACK DRUM FISHING IN SWFL –Black drum may be caught throughout the year. Best months however are:
JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC

Sources

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