



Rockfish Identification



For the purposes of sport fishery management, rockfish are divided into two groups, **PELAGIC** and **NONPELAGIC**. 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:

Six pelagic species of rockfish are often found mid-water in schools, close to rocky structures. These fish are moderately long-lived (most fish are 7-30 years old).

Black Rockfish



(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.

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.

Yellowtail Rockfish



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

Photo by Vicky Okimura (WDFW)

Widow Rockfish



This is a relatively slim species in various shades of brown or brass that lighten towards the belly. Size: up to 23 inches.

Dark Rockfish



Uniform black to dark blue on back and sides with slight gradual lightening on the belly, more common in shallow water. Size: up to 20 inches.

There are over 30 species of rockfish in Alaska. If the rockfish is not featured in the pelagic category, then for the purposes of regulation it is a nonpelagic rockfish.

Nonpelagic 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).

Quillback Rockfish



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

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.

Tiger Rockfish



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

Yelloweye Rockfish



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.

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.



Rockfish caught in deep water often sustain injuries — referred to as barotrauma — caused by rapid decompression and expansion of gases in the swim bladder.

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If released at the surface, these fish are often not able to swim back down and become targets for birds, other fish and marine mammals.

WHAT IS BAROTRAUMA?

The protruding stomach and bulging eyes seen on this Yelloweye rockfish are signs of barotrauma. If released at the surface, this fish would have a difficult time resubmerging and would likely die. Using deepwater release methods can greatly increase the chance of survival of fish exhibiting signs of barotrauma. Both pelagic and nonpelagic rockfish are susceptible to barotrauma.

Help Conserve Alaska's Rockfish

Practice Deepwater Release

Deepwater Release Methods

Step 1:

Make sure your release device is ready — rockfish are most likely to survive when time at the surface is minimized. With practice, rockfish can be released within two minutes of reaching the surface .



Reel the fish up as quickly as possible. After unhooking it, hook the release device through soft tissue on the jaw. Make sure the hook does not have a barb. Release the anti-reverse on the reel so line can spool out freely.

Rockfish are most likely to survive when released quickly at depth of capture (or 100 feet) using the following steps:

Step 2:

Swing the fish slightly to one side and let go of the jig. Let line out as the weight pulls the fish back to the bottom. When the jig hits bottom (or 100 feet in depth), lock the reel and give a hard tug to release the fish.



Conservation Tips

▪ Avoid catching unwanted rockfish.

When targeting other species, such as halibut or lingcod, avoid rockfish by keeping jigs and bait 10-15 feet off the bottom. This has little or no affect on halibut and lingcod catch rates. Move to a different area if you are catching rockfish unintentionally.

▪ Avoid excessive rockfish harvests.

Rockfish have a freezer life of about four months, so harvest only what you are likely to eat in the near future.

▪ Use release-friendly tackle.

When fishing with bait, use a single circle hook. Circle hooks are less likely to cause injury by being deeply swallowed, increasing the chances of survival for released fish.

Learn more at: www.adfg.alaska.gov/rockfish