

Spotted Seatrout

Cynoscion nebulosus

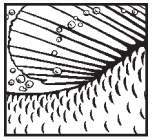


The spotted seatrout, commonly called speckled trout, is one of the most popular sport fish along the Texas coast. It occurs in the western Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, ranging from Massachusetts to the Yucatan peninsula.

Coastal Wetlands

Spotted Seatrout

Cynoscion nebulosus



APPEARANCE

Length: Males: average 19 inches (48 cm)

Females: 25 inches (63 cm)

Weight: 2 to 3 pounds (1 to 1.3 kg)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- Dark gray or green back with distinct round spots on back, fins and tail
- Silvery-white below
- Black margin along the edge of tail
- Soft *dorsal* (back) fin has no scales
- One or two prominent canine teeth usually present at tip of upper jaw

LIFE HISTORY

Range: Bays along the Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico

Diet: Small trout feed primarily on small crustaceans. Medium-size trout feed on shrimp and small fish. Large fish feed almost exclusively on other fish.

Predators: Alligator gar, striped bass, Atlantic croaker, tarpon and barracuda

Sexual maturity: At one to two years

Spawning season: February through October

Eggs: 100,000 to a million

Incubation: 16 to 20 hours after fertilization

Life span: Up to ten years

HABITAT

Spotted seatrout prefer shallower bays and estuaries with oyster beds and seagrass beds that attract prey species.

BEHAVIOR

A female spotted seatrout may spawn several times during the season. Younger females may release 100,000 eggs and older, larger females may release a million eggs. Recent studies indicate that spotted seatrout spawn between dusk and dawn and usually within coastal bays, estuaries and lagoons. They prefer shallow grassy areas where eggs and larvae have some cover from predators. Spotted seatrout swim near seagrass beds of shallow bays and estuaries during spring and summer, looking for prey. As water temperatures decline during fall, they move into deeper bay waters and the Gulf of Mexico. As water temperatures warm in the spring, the fish return to the shallows of the primary and secondary bays.

NOW YOU KNOW!

- Some trout caught may have worms embedded in the flesh along the backbone. These "spaghetti" worms are larval stages of a tapeworm that can only reach maturity in sharks. The worms cannot survive in man even if the seatrout is eaten raw. The worms can easily be removed when the fish is cleaned to make the meat more appealing.
- The fish is a member of the croaker family (Sciaenidae) and is a first cousin to the Atlantic croaker, red drum, black drum, and sand seatrout.

SPOTTED SEATROUT AND PEOPLE

Its abundance, willingness to hit natural and artificial baits, and fine eating qualities make the species extremely popular with anglers. It has been commercially harvested in all the states bordering the Gulf of Mexico. However, a decline in harvest of spotted seatrout in recent years caused Alabama and Texas to close commercial fishing of the species. The decline in the seatrout catch is linked to destruction of seagrass beds and over-fishing.

In Texas, the record spotted seatrout caught was 33.75 inches (85.7 cm) and 13 pounds 9 ounces (about 6 kg).

