

Rockfish of British Columbia

THERE are approximately twenty-nine species of fish in British Columbia waters belonging to the genus *Sebastes* which collectively are called "rockfish". The fishermen give them a variety of common names, some of which are rock-cod, snappers, canaries, black bass, rock salmon, and Pacific Ocean perch. Their nearest relative in the Atlantic is the redfish. The rockfish species of the Pacific coast appear to be very abundant off the British Columbia coast.

DESCRIPTION

The rockfish as a group are distinguished by their stout, heavily constructed bodies. Large broad heads, usually bearing spines and strong ridges, and heavily-spined fins are notable features. The colour patterns vary greatly among species and range from black and drab green through to brilliant orange and crimson. The colour of some species is made even more bizarre by the presence of wide red or black stripes.

HABITS

As a rule the rockfishes are found in the vicinity of reefs and rough bottom. A few species, such as the copper rockfish and the orange-spotted rockfish occur among the kelp patches in shallow water from the intertidal zone to depths of twenty fathoms. These two species are usually termed "rock-cod" by the fishermen. Other more brightly coloured species, usually termed "red-cod", such as the red snapper, orange rockfish, and "Spanish flag" occur at depths from thirty to over one hundred fathoms. The majority of the species are inhabitants of deep water off the open coast.

All of the species bear their young alive in prodigious numbers. These young fish are not much more than a quarter of an inch in length when born. During the summer months large schools of fingerling rockfish are encountered in the inlets and bays bordering the open coast. These small fish must also be very abundant in offshore waters for they are frequently found in the stomachs of the albacore tuna.



Pacific Rockfish

The food of the rockfishes consists of herring, sand lance and other small fish, crabs, shrimps and euphausiids.

AGE AND GROWTH

The study of the annulations on scales has revealed that the rockfishes as a group are much slower growing than other groundfish species. It would appear that most of the species do not reach commercial size until they are eight to ten years of age. Some specimens as old as twenty five years have been recorded.

FISHING METHODS

High-opening trawls of light web have proved to be the most effective means of capturing rockfish, since these fish do not congregate so close to the bottom as other groundfish species. Small quantities are caught incidentally in the hand-line fishery for lingcod and the long-line fishery for halibut and blackcod.

HANDLING

Rockfish caught by trawlers are landed in the round while those caught by line vessels are landed dressed with heads off. Most of the catch is filleted and packaged for freezing. A limited amount goes to the fresh fish market and to the "Fish and Chips" trade.

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