



WOLFFISH

What you need to know



Photo: Andrew J. Martinez

Three species of wolffish, often called catfish, are now protected under the Species at Risk Act (SARA). As a group, they are easy to recognize due to their unique appearance, but it is more difficult to distinguish the three species.

Under SARA, they are listed as:

NORTHERN WOLFFISH: THREATENED

(likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction)

SPOTTED WOLFFISH: THREATENED

(likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction)

ATLANTIC OR STRIPED WOLFFISH: SPECIAL CONCERN

(a wildlife species that may become a threatened or endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats)

Their status under SARA dictates the manner in which they are protected, and how they are to be handled when captured accidentally. This identification card can help you identify wolffish when caught as bycatch.

Like all animals, wolffish play an important role in the ecosystem of the ocean, and their survival depends on all of us. Releasing wolffish with care in the place where they were caught will help their populations recover.



WOLFFISH

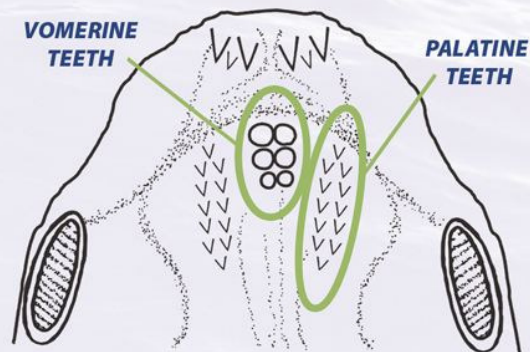
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Abundances of all three wolffish species have declined off eastern Canada during the past 20 years. Threats to wolffish include bycatch mortality in commercial fisheries and disturbance of their marine habitat.



NORTHERN WOLFFISH SARA STATUS: THREATENED
(also known as broadhead wolffish, bull-headed catfish, broad-headed catfish, Arctic wolffish, and jelly cat)

The head is small relative to the body. Pectoral fins and gill openings are also small. The body colour is more uniform for all sizes, ranging from dark grey to dark brown to purplish black. Indistinct dark spots are possible, but rare. Flesh is jelly-like. On dead wolffish you can see the Palatine teeth on the upper jaw extend farther backwards towards the throat than Vomerine teeth (see diagram).



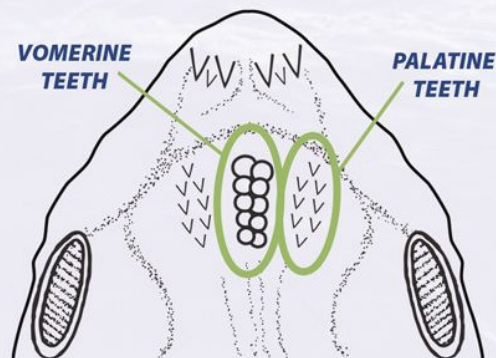
SIZE: Up to 144 centimeters long and weighs up to 20 kilograms.



SPOTTED WOLFFISH SARA STATUS: THREATENED
(catfish, spotted catfish, leopardfish)

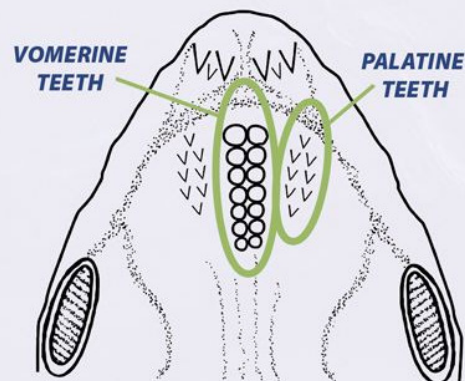
SIZE: Up to 150 centimeters long and weighs up to 22 kilograms.

The head is large relative to the body, with dark spots on fins and body. Juveniles are greyish brown (sometimes with a purplish colour), and adults range from yellowish brown to greyish brown to dark brown. Flesh is firm. On dead wolffish you can see the Vomerine teeth on the upper jaw extend backwards towards the throat as far as Palatine teeth (see diagram).



ATLANTIC OR STRIPED WOLFFISH SARA STATUS: SPECIAL CONCERN
(catfish, ocean wolffish)

The head is large relative to the body, with vertical stripes on fins and body. Juveniles are yellowish brown with olive green fins, and adults range from yellowish brown to slate/purplish blue. Flesh is firm. On dead wolffish you can see the Vomerine teeth on the upper jaw extend farther backwards towards the throat than Palatine teeth (see diagram).



SIZE: Up to 152 centimeters long and weighs up to 22 kilograms.