

Rockfishes belong to the family *Scorpaenidae* (scorpionfishes)—one of the more interesting and colorful groups of fishes found in the Pacific Ocean.

Rockfish are more vulnerable to overharvest than other marine species, because: (1) they are attracted to specific habitats and hence easily found and caught; (2) they mature late and do not reproduce until they are 7 to 20 years old; (3) they produce few young, and (4) they do not often survive release.

Rockfish bear live young (larvae) that are only about 1/4-inch long and highly vulnerable when released—usually during spring and summer.

The Gulf of Alaska is home to about 32 rockfish species, but only 15 are common in the nearshore shelf area (100 fathoms or less).

Those shelf species are divided into two groups based on their habits. *Pelagic* (open water) rockfishes are often found in schools midway in the water column, and close to rocky structures. The most common species are black, dusky, and yellowtail rockfish. *Non-pelagic*, or demersal (bottom-dwelling) rockfishes live and feed on or near the ocean floor—usually in rocky or boulder-strewn habitats. The most common species are yelloweye, quillback, silvergray, and copper rockfish.



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.

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



CHINA ROCKFISH: Mostly black, with bright yellow and white blotches and a yellow strip along most of the lateral line. Size: up to 17 inches.



PELAGIC ROCKFISH



DUSKY ROCKFISH—Two distinct types:

Light Dusky (shown above)—brownish body color, whitish belly often edged in pink; found in deep water.

Dark Dusky—uniformly black, no white belly; found in shallow water. Size: up to 20 inches.

YELLOWTAIL ROCKFISH:

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



BLACK ROCKFISH—often misnamed ‘black bass’:

Dark gray to black with white belly. Usually uniform in color, but may have lighter patches along back. Size: up to 25 inches.



YELLOWEYE ROCKFISH (red snapper):

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.

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



Rockfish have swim bladders that are not directly vented, so when they are brought to the surface from deep water (below 60 ft) their swim bladder expands and compresses internal organs, often forcing the stomach through the mouth. They cannot re-submerge and survive these injuries. To avoid incidental catches of rockfish when targeting halibut and other species, avoid high-relief rocky areas and steep-sided rock piles. Use a single large circle hook with large chunks of bait, and bury the barb in the bait. If you get small nibbles or catch a rockfish, move immediately to another spot. If you are using large jigs for lingcod, keep them well off the bottom. If you target rockfish, focus on pelagic species—in waters shallower than 60 ft. □

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.



NON-PELAGIC ROCKFISH