

# Red Drum

*Sciaenops ocellatus*



TPWD PHOTO

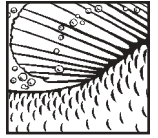


The red drum is a popular game fish in coastal waters from Massachusetts to Mexico. It is easily recognized by the black spot on its tail.

*Coastal Wetlands*

# Red Drum

*Sciaenops ocellatus*



## APPEARANCE

**Length:** 11 inches (28 cm) at one year

**Weight:** 1 pound (.45 kg) at one year

### Distinguishing Characteristics

- Deep copper (nearly black) to reddish-bronze, and sometimes almost silver
- Lighter-colored in clear waters
- Dark spot on the upper part of their tail

## LIFE HISTORY

**Range:** From Massachusetts to Key West, Florida, and along the Gulf Coast to Tuxpan, Mexico

**Diet:** Young fish feed on small crabs, shrimp and marine worms. As they grow older, they feed on larger crabs, shrimp, small fish and sometimes their cousins, the Atlantic croaker.

**Predators:** Humans, birds, larger fish and turtles

**Sexual maturity:** Between the third and fourth year

**Spawning season:** Mid-August through mid-October in Gulf waters, near the mouths of passes and shorelines

**Incubation:** 24 hours

**Young:** Larvae are carried into tidal bays by the current. They move to quiet, shallow water with grassy or muddy bottoms to feed on *detritus* (dead or decomposing plant and animal matter).

**Life span:** Oldest recorded was 37 years.

## HABITAT

Red drum are most abundant in water 1 to 4 feet (30 cm to 1.2 m) deep with submerged vegetation such as seagrasses. They prefer soft mud along jetties, pier pilings and jetties.

## BEHAVIOR

During spawning, red drum males attract females by producing a drum-like noise by vibrating a muscle in their swim bladder. During the fall, especially during stormy weather, large adult males move toward very shallow water along beaches in what anglers call the "bull redfish run." They sometimes swim in water so shallow that their backs are exposed.

## NOW YOU KNOW!

- Red drum are related to black drum, spotted seatrout, weakfish, mullets and croakers, most of which also make drumming sounds.
- Scientists believe that the black spot near their tail helps fool predators into attacking the red drum's tail instead of their head, allowing the red drum to escape.

## RED DRUM AND PEOPLE

Red drum is considered a great sport fish because it will hit on most kinds of bait. The Texas record for a red drum catch was 51.5 pounds (23 kg); however, a red drum weighing 94 pounds (42.69 kg) was caught along the North Carolina coast.

