

Black Drum

Pogonias cromis



OTHER NAMES:

Drum
Striped Drum
Tambour

RANGE: All Gulf states and northern Mexico.

HABITAT: Surf and estuarine areas. Passes and channels hold most of the trophy-size fish, but they also roam the surf. Bridges and piers all around the northern Gulf Coast produce many big Drum. Smaller Drum forage in much the same places as Redfish—along shell bars, shorelines and on shallow flats.

DESCRIPTION: Drum are similar in shape to Redfish, and large specimens may even have a bronze coloration that might add to the confusion; however, Drum can always be distinguished by the barbels, or “feelers,” under the chin. Juvenile Drum have black vertical stripes on dusky white sides, and so are more likely to be mistaken for Sheepshead (Chapter 14) than Redfish. Drum, however, lack the prominent sheep-like teeth that give the Sheepshead its name. The stripes fade with age.

SIZE: Drum over 75 pounds have been caught in the Gulf, and specimens weighing 30 to 50 pounds are not rare. Striped juveniles generally weigh 1-15 pounds. World record 113 pounds, 1 ounce.

FOOD VALUE: Smaller fish, up to perhaps 8 pounds, are about as desirable for the table as small Redfish. Larger ones become coarse.

GAME QUALITIES: Although the fight is strong, Drum are not the challenge of Redfish.

TACKLE AND BAITS: When chasing the big boys, surf tackle and saltwater boat rods should get the call, but even lunker Drum can be caught rather easily on spinning and casting tackle when open water combines with angler patience. Crustaceans-shrimp, cut blue crab, small whole crabs-are the best baits for Drum, although cut fish and squid work fairly well. Drum are not avid lure-chasers but can be taken on slowly worked jigs in deep water, and by carefully presented streamer flies and jigs on the flats.

FISHING SYSTEMS: Still Fishing; Casting.