

Cobia

Rachycentron canadum



OTHER NAMES:

Ling
Crab Eater
Lemonfish
Cobbeo
Slob

RANGE: Gulfwide.

HABITAT: Cobia may be found anywhere from shallow inshore flats to the deep sea. Most Gulf Cobia winter in southern Florida or offshore, migrating northward in the spring to cover the entire Gulf Coast. Dramatic runs occur along northern beaches, beginning in March, usually, and peaking in April and May. Cobia love to hang around navigation markers, wrecks and artificial reefs, where they swim both at the surface and down deep. They also escort wandering Mantas and other large rays, and many are caught around those hosts. Many are caught from Gulf fishing piers. Juveniles—and an occasional lunker—are sometimes caught incidentally by trout fishermen over Gulf Coast grass flats.

DESCRIPTION: Cobia are very shark-like in appearance, being dark, torpedo shaped and usually fairly large. Out of water, the leathery skin adds to the impression, but the flattened head, frontal jaws and absence of teeth are the obvious differences. The usual color is brown or dark gray above, whitish on the underside, with a dark stripe running from gills to base of tail. The striped appearance is more vivid in juveniles. Several rather sharp finlets on the dorsal surface extend from behind the head to the dorsal fin.

SIZE: Common from 20 to 50 pounds; sometimes over 100. World record 135 pounds, 9 ounces.

FOOD VALUE: Excellent. Unique taste.

GAME QUALITIES: A strong but unpredictable fighter. Usually clicks off fairly long, fast runs, and can fight deep with great stamina.

TACKLE AND BAITS: Surf tackle is the best bet for pier fishing—and for boat fishing when long casts with heavy lures are called for. Since Cobia are notorious for wrapping lines around buoys and wreck structure, most anglers use saltwater gear, with 30-pound-test line or heavier, when livebaiting in such spots. Once clear of obstructions, however, even large Cobia can be successfully fought with spinning, baitcasting and fly tackle—although a minimum of 10-pound line or tippet is advisable. Light gear, in fact, can be better than heavy, inasmuch as it generally requires the angler to fight the fish longer. When gaffed “green” (not tired), Cobia can—and often do—smash up the inside of a boat. Jigs, ranging from ½ ounce to 2 ounces in weight, depending on casting distance or depth needed, and large streamer flies are the most-used artificials.

FISHING SYSTEMS: Still Fishing; Casting; Trolling; Drifting.