

Black Grouper

Mycteroperca bonaci



OTHER NAMES:

Bonaci Arara
Aguaji

RANGE: *May be encountered in deep water of the northern Gulf, but more common in the Florida Keys, Cuba and tropical Mexico.*

HABITAT: *Blacks of many sizes are found around the edges of coral reefs in the tropics, from about 30 feet of water out to the deepest dropoffs. Even big fish, however, may roam to much shallower patch reefs, especially in cooler seasons.*

DESCRIPTION: Overall color is dark gray. Markings are blacker than those of the Gag, and form box-like patterns. Fins are black, and their edges are often deep blue.

SIZE: The Gulf's largest *Mycteroperca* grouper, the Black frequently exceeds 50 pounds in weight and can top 100. World record 114 pounds.

FOOD VALUE: Excellent.

GAME QUALITIES: Considered as perhaps the toughest of the Groupers.

TACKLE AND BAITS: For all-around work, ocean gear with lines of 30-pound test or higher gets the call. Light-tackle fishermen in the Florida Keys, however, have caught many Blacks over 50 pounds. Besides a huge helping of luck, the way to try this is to hook the fish while drifting, instead of at anchor. The drift of the boat adds to the power of the tackle and just might help drag the big fish far enough away from his rocky "hole" that he cannot get back. For drifting or still fishing, the best baits are frisky live fish, such as Blue Runners or other small jacks. Pinfish and Pilchards are good too, as are Mullet heads and other large cut-baits. Best casting lures are leadhead jigs, weighing from 1-4 ounces, depending on depth. Trolling over the reefs with rigged, swimming Mullet; feather-and-strip combos; and large plugs also takes many.

FISHING SYSTEMS: Drifting; Still Fishing; Trolling.