

Gray Snapper



Gray Snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*)



Gray Snapper, or Mangrove Snapper, are a smaller and slimmer snapper species rarely exceeding two feet in length. They are abundant throughout the Gulf of America, especially around reefs and oil rigs. Despite its name, Gray Snapper can vary in color, but generally have a dark gray to brown upper half with rusty coloration on the lower half with darker dorsal and tail fins. Gray Snapper have two prominent canine teeth in the front upper jaw and may have a dark horizontal band across the eye.

Habitat

Gray Snapper occur throughout the western Atlantic Ocean from Massachusetts southward along the Atlantic coastline through the Gulf of America to Brazil. Gray Snapper live in shallow coastal waters to deep offshore waters up to 585 feet deep.

Juvenile Gray Snapper can be found in estuaries, coastal lakes, and bays. They are often found around hard structure, grass beds, and mangroves until they are about 8 to 10 inches long.

Adult Gray Snapper move offshore and tend to stay in the same area for long periods once they are established.

In Louisiana, large aggregations of adult Gray Snapper are found around offshore structures such as reefs, wrecks, rocky areas, and oil and gas platforms.



Diet

Gray Snapper are opportunistic predators with a varied diet that changes as they age. As larvae, Gray Snapper feed on zooplankton and copepods.

Juvenile Gray Snapper feed mainly on crustaceans and small fish found in submersed vegetation on mud bottoms during the day. Juveniles may also eat mollusks and polychaete worms.

As they mature, Gray Snapper become primarily nocturnal feeders while consuming small fishes, crustaceans, gastropods, and cephalopods.

Spawning Season

Gray Snapper reach maturity after age 2, around 8-10 inches long. Adults spawn offshore between April and November with a peak from June to August. Gray Snapper may spawn several times during a single season. Spawning occurs in large aggregations around a full moon.

Females broadcast their eggs in open water above the ocean floor, which will be fertilized by one or more males when the eggs reach the bottom.

Once fertilized, the eggs will hatch approximately 20 hours later. Larval Gray Snapper move with currents into inshore waters during their first month, where they settle in estuaries.

Age & Growth

Ear stones, or otoliths, can be used to determine the age of fish. Field biologists remove otoliths from the skulls of fish and send them to LDWF’s Age and Growth Lab. At the lab, otoliths are cut into small sections and placed under a microscope to reveal growth rings. In a process similar to aging trees, biologists count the number of rings to determine the age of a fish. Fish age, length, and weight data are used to estimate information about the population such as growth rates, average size, and max age. Fishery managers use age and growth information as part of a comprehensive fisheries stock assessment. The assessment is used to develop conservation recommendations that will ensure a healthy and sustainable fishery. The chart below shows that Gray Snapper grow rapidly during the first few years of life, and then growth slows as they get older. Once Gray Snapper mature, they invest more energy in reproduction rather than growth.

AGE (YEARS)	AVERAGE LENGTH (INCHES)	APPROXIMATE LENGTH RANGE (INCHES)
1	7	6-8
2	9.5	8-11
3	11.5	9.5-13
4	13	11-15
5	14.5	12-17
6	16	13-18
7	17	14-19.5
8	17.5	14.5-20.5
9	18.5	15-21.5
10	19	16-22

Data Source: LDWF Fish Management

Contact Information

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
2000 Quail Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70808
225-765-2800
www.wlf.louisiana.gov

Licenses and Boat Registration
225-765-2887 or 225-765-2898

Recreational Offshore Landing Permits
rolp.wlf.la.gov

Enforcement
225-765-2987



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Gray Snapper Management

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) manage the recreational and commercial harvest of the Gulf of America Gray Snapper stock. Gray Snapper season is typically open year round, but will close if harvest exceeds the annual quota set by the Council. Gray Snapper have a 12-inch minimum length and are within the 10-snapper aggregate daily harvest bag limit per angler (includes Gray, Mutton, Yellowtail, Cubera, Queen, Blackfin, Wenchman, and Silk snappers). NMFS and the Council set these limits based upon stock assessments completed through the SouthEast Data, Assessment & Review (SEDAR) process, which uses data collected from throughout the Gulf of America. LDWF biologists, along with other state and federal biologists, collect data for these assessments in their respective states by sampling from research vessels and collecting data dockside about anglers’ catches. Information on the recreational and commercial harvest of saltwater fish, including Gray Snapper, is gathered through a number of State and Federal surveys including LDWF’s recreational LA Creel Survey, the Commercial Trip Ticket Program, the NMFS Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), and the NMFS commercial statistical records survey.

The commercial and recreational Annual Catch Limit (ACL) for the Gulf stock of Gray Snapper can vary depending on the most recent stock assessment (currently 2.23 million pounds). Since 2014, Louisiana’s recreational anglers have landed, on average, just over 83,000 Gray Snapper each year, or approximately 1% of the total annual recreational saltwater landings in Louisiana. Gulf wide, recreational landings of Gray Snapper comprise more than 90% of the total Gray Snapper harvest.

Quick Facts

- Gray Snapper caught offshore can reach 8 to 10 pounds.
- Gray Snapper can live up to 25 years.
- Known to be great bait stealers, Gray Snapper are often encountered while fishing for larger prey on offshore oil rigs.