

# Spotted Seatrout



## Spotted Seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*)



The spotted seatrout, also called speckled trout or speck, is a marine fish with black spots on its back, fins, and tail. It has an iridescent, dark silvery-gray back over a silvery-white underside, and usually one or two prominent, sharp canine teeth at the tip of the upper jaw.

### Spawning

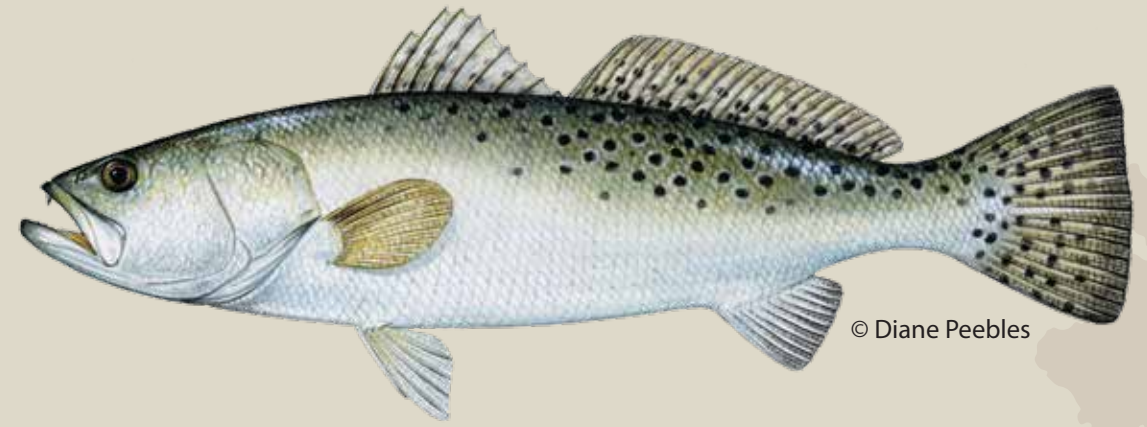
Almost all spotted seatrout, both males and females, begin to spawn at age 1, usually the first summer after they have hatched.

Spotted seatrout spawning season begins in April and continues into September, with a peak in activity in April and May and another peak in August.

Male spotted seatrout produce “drumming” sounds by vibrating specialized muscles against the swim bladder to attract females during courtship and spawning. The ability to drum, or lack thereof, can be used to differentiate between male and female spotted seatrout.

Spotted seatrout spawn in variously sized schools from early evening until about midnight, usually in or adjacent to deeper, flowing waters in channels or passes.

A female spotted seatrout can spawn from 100,000 to 500,000 eggs (depending on her size) every 4 to 5 days throughout the spawning season. A large healthy female can produce as many as 10 million eggs in a single season.



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### Age and Size

In Louisiana waters, spotted seatrout can live up to 10 years. Due to high natural and fishing mortalities, few individuals of either sex live longer than 4 years.

Both male and female spotted seatrout grow very quickly during their first year after hatching. Females grow somewhat faster than males and reach the legal minimum size limit (12 inches as of 2017) as quickly as one year before males.

Size and age are marginally related among spotted seatrout. A 12-inch (304 mm) fish might be as young as 1 year or as old as 4 years. On the other hand, a 3-year-old fish could be from 10 inches (254 mm) to 23 inches (584 mm) long.

### Habitat and Diet

Spotted seatrout live in shallow coastal and estuarine waters over sandy bottoms, oyster reefs, and seagrass beds. They tolerate a wide range of salinities, including the hypersaline waters found in some Texas lagoons.

During the warm summer months, spotted seatrout live in shallow waters but move to deeper pockets of water in estuaries during the cooler months. They rarely migrate far from the estuary in which they were spawned.

Newly hatched spotted seatrout feed primarily on small crustaceans such as copepods. As they grow, they shift to larger prey including mysids and shrimp. Mature spotted seatrout feed on shrimp and fishes including anchovies, pinfish, silversides, mullets, croakers, and menhaden.

## Age and Growth

LDWF uses “ear stones” called otoliths to calculate the age of fish. Biologists remove these hard structures from the skull of bony fish and cut them into thin small sections to reveal yearly growth rings. In a process similar to ageing trees, they count the number of rings to determine the age of a fish. Fishery managers use fish age, length, and weight data to estimate growth rates, mortality rates, and population size. The chart below shows that spotted seatrout grow rapidly during the first few years of life, and then growth slows as they get older. Once spotted seatrout mature, they invest more energy in reproduction rather than growth, and males grow more slowly.

### Male Growth

AGE (YEARS)	APPROX. AVERAGE LENGTH	APPROX. LENGTH RANGE
1	8"	6" - 9"
2	12"	9" - 14"
3	15"	12" - 18"
4	17"	12" - 20"
5	19"	15" - 22"
6	20"	16" - 24"
7+	21"	17" - 25"

### Female Growth

AGE (YEARS)	APPROX. AVERAGE LENGTH	APPROX. LENGTH RANGE
1	10"	8" - 11"
2	15"	12" - 18"
3	19"	15" - 23"
4	21"	17" - 26"
5	23"	18" - 28"
6	24"	19" - 29"
7+	25"	20" - 29"

## 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



Your purchase of fishing equipment and motorboat fuel supports Sport Fish Restoration and boating access facilities.

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## Spotted Seatrout Quick Facts

Spotted seatrout are most abundant in the estuarine and nearshore waters of the Northern Gulf of Mexico.

The oldest male spotted seatrout sampled by LDWF was 10 years of age and 23.8 inches (605 mm) total length (TL); the longest male spotted seatrout was 28.6 inches (726 mm) TL and 8 years of age.

The oldest female spotted seatrout sampled by LDWF was 8 years of age and 25.6 inches (650 mm) TL; the longest female was 28.7 inches (729 mm) TL and 6 years of age.

Spotted seatrout spend their entire life cycle in or near Louisiana's estuarine marshes, which provide habitat for all of its life stages, from egg to adult. Some scientists believe that the rapid loss of our coastal marshes will result in fewer spotted seatrout in the future.

## Spotted Seatrout Management

Louisiana manages recreational harvest of spotted seatrout in the state's waters with both a daily harvest limit and a minimum size limit. The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission sets these limits based on stock assessments completed by LDWF every three to four years. LDWF biologists meticulously collect data for the assessments during both dockside sampling of anglers' catch and sampling conducted on research vessels.

LDWF gathers information on recreational harvest of saltwater fish, including spotted seatrout, through its LA Creel survey, implemented in 2014. LA Creel replaced NOAA Fisheries Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) survey, which was used from 2006 to 2013 to estimate recreational saltwater finfish harvests. Due to differences in methodologies, annual harvest estimates by LA Creel and MRIP cannot be directly compared until the survey results are calibrated.

Since 2014, recreational fishermen have harvested between 3 and 5 million spotted seatrout annually from Louisiana's bays, estuaries, and nearshore waters. The commercial fishery for spotted seatrout is limited to rod and reel gear and a one million pound annual quota; commercial fishermen only harvest about 2,000 pounds of spotted seatrout per year.