

# COBIA

*Rachycentron canadum*



## Life History and Habitat Needs

### Geographic Range

A fish with many names: cobia are also known as ling, flathead, black kingfish, lemonfish, black salmon, crab-eater, black bonito or brown clown.

Cobia are found in offshore, nearshore, and inshore subtropical to tropical waters of the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific Oceans. In the western portion of the Atlantic Ocean these pelagic swimmers roam from Massachusetts to Florida along the eastern seaboard of the U.S. and into Bermuda and the Bahamas and throughout the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean.

### Movement/Migration

Cobia prefer warm temperate waters, and migrate south from the Gulf of Mexico and northern Atlantic states to southern states in the late fall, returning in the spring and early summer to northern haunts. During their migration, cobia are often spotted in association with large marine animals including sharks, whales, turtles, manta rays, and other large fish. The migratory habitats and extent of mixing between the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico stocks are currently being investigated by scientists from many states to evaluate the accuracy of the current stock boundary line at the Florida/Georgia border used by fisheries managers. Over 160 acoustic tags have been surgically implanted in cobia from South Carolina down to South Florida. As Cobia make their annual migrations, the tags are detected on sonic listening devices called transducers placed in the water along the coastline. Anglers are asked to be on the lookout for cobia tagged with two external tags that identify the fish has an internal acoustic tagged individual. Releasing cobia with an internal acoustic tag, and reporting capture details greatly benefit researchers in providing more data on this highly prized species.

### Spawning

Cobia spawn in the summer along the southeastern United States and in the early fall in the Gulf of Mexico. Genetic analysis has shown that cobia in the U.S. include two breeding groups, the Atlantic stock and the Gulf of Mexico stock with a mixing zone somewhere between Cape Canaveral, Florida and Hilton Head, South Carolina.

### Habitat Use

This fish is a pelagic, highly migratory species that can be found down to 1200 m in the deep ocean, and tolerates a wide range of salinities from nearly fresh to full seawater and temperatures from 17 – 32°C. Cobia do not have a swim bladder which enables them to search for prey throughout the entire water column. They predominantly feed on crustaceans but also eat benthic and pelagic fishes and invertebrates. Cobia are known to live up to 10 years, grow to six ft (1.8 m), and weigh up to and beyond 100 lbs (45 kg). Cobia orient to structure, using both natural and artificial reefs, and can also be found near buoys, pilings, channel markers, and floating debris.

## Threats to Habitat

- Dredging and coastal development leading to sedimentation and burial of hardbottom reef communities
- Contamination of estuarine and oceanic waters (oil pollution, mercury, etc.)
- Reduced water quality leading to seagrass loss
- Fishery gear impacts to hardbottom communities (trawling, dredging, etc.)
- Effects of climate change on regional water temperatures and supporting habitat communities

## Habitat Research Needs

- Identifying juvenile and sub-adult habitat requirements as they pertain to population bottlenecks
- Effects of contaminants in the water column on reproduction success
- Modeling impacts to reef communities associated with climate change

## Additional Information

Red drum are managed under Amendment 2 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Red Drum (June 2002) and Addendum I (2013). Addendum I addresses habitat needs and concerns for the species. These documents can be found on the ASMFC website at [www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org) or by contacting the ASMFC Habitat Program Coordinator at 703.842.0740.

