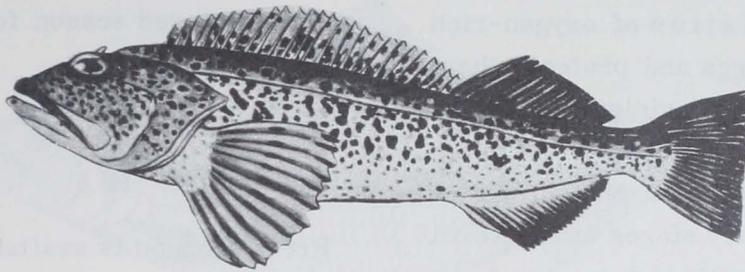


FOOD FISH FACTS



Lingcod
(*Ophiodon elongatus*)

The lingcod, a fish native to the Pacific coast, is considered by many to be one of the finest eating fishes of the West. Although the name denotes "belonging to the cod family," it is misleading. Lingcod, first recorded in 1881 as coming from the waters of British Columbia, is a member of the Hexagrammidae family, one of a number of species commonly called greenlings. Local, more colorful names for the lingcod are blue cod, buffalo cod, and cultus cod. The latter name comes from the Indian term cultus, meaning false. Lingcod is not a true cod.

Description

For such a highly prized fish, appearances are both deceiving and detracting. Coloration, highly variable, is closely associated with habitat. Basically, lingcod has subdued coloration ranging from a mottled brown to bluish-green with cream colored undersides. The spots or blotches are brown, green, or tan, outlined in orange or light blue. Female markings, usually lighter in color, have orange tracings rather than blue. The lingcod has a large protruding mouth armed with good-sized canine-like teeth, two large,

fleshy flaps (cirri) above the eyes, double nostrils, and a long, deeply notched, dark dorsal fin. The body and head are covered with smooth, small scales. Males, which are usually smaller than females, range up to 3 feet, while females may attain a length of 5 feet. Lingcod range from 5 to 20 pounds average weight, although fish up to 40 pounds are not uncommon. A few have been recorded that weight up to 100 pounds.

Habitat

The bottom-dwelling, extremely voracious and prolific lingcod favor intertidal zone reefs and kelp beds that have strong tidal currents. As adults, lingcod are found at depths from 60 to 100 fathoms along the entire Pacific coast. They range from the Baja Peninsula of California to Northwest Alaska but are most abundant in the colder waters of the north.

Life History

In a single spawning, the female deposits her eggs, upwards to half-a-million, in large adhesive, pinkish-white masses in sheltered, rocky locations or on kelp beds below the lowest tidal levels. In minus tides, they can be seen clinging to kelp or rocks. After fer-

tilization, the male guards them until hatched. He fans the eggs with his fins to provide good circulation of oxygen-rich waters around the eggs and protects them from intruders with swift, vicious passes at any approaching danger. Principal spawning season is from December to March. Little is known about the early stages of lingcod development, but fingerlings from 3 to 5 inches long are taken occasionally by seining in the eelgrass during the summer. Tagging studies indicate lingcod do not travel widely from natural habitat. The young feed on small crustaceans while adults graduate to herring, flounders, cod, hake, squid, crustaceans, and little lingcod that are unfortunate enough to be in the area at dinnertime.

Fishing

Commercial fishermen obtain most of the lingcod catch with otter trawls. However, some fish are taken with set lines, handlines, and troll lines. The vast majority of the catch is taken from Washington State waters followed by catches from Oregon, Alaska, and California. Fishing for lingcod is year-round along the entire Pacific coast but is best in California from April to October. Further north the fishing is best from October to May. Lingcod is a highly prized fish which gives anglers an exciting battle on light tackle. When a lingcod is caught, however, the hook has to be removed with care because of the fish's dangerously sharp teeth. In recent years, spearfishing for lingcod by skindivers

has become popular in Puget Sound. The sport has become so popular that the state now has a closed season for spearfishing to prevent exploitation.

Use

Fresh lingcod is available along the Pacific coast, but the fish is sold frozen in other areas of the country. It is highly desirable as a fine eating fresh fish and is marketed as dressed, fillets, and steaks. Smoked lingcod is another delicacy found in the markets. A characteristic that keeps the uninitiated from trying lingcod is the unusual green or bluish-green color of the flesh. The greenish color flesh is most common in the smaller, immature fish. It is not harmful and disappears upon cooking to produce a delicate, white, tender flesh very low in fat. Some of the preferred methods of preparation for lingcod fillets and steaks are broiling, butter-sauteing, and poaching. Whole fish can be baked or poached. For broiling, natives often split small fish down the middle, remove the backbone and cook. An increasingly popular method for preparing lingcod is to pan or deep-fat fry for "fish and chips." Today, most of the lingcod produced goes into the rapidly expanding commercial "fish and chips" trade. (Source: National Marketing Services Office, NMFS, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 100 East Ohio St., Rm. 526, Chicago, Illinois 60611.)