

Coho Salmon a.k.a. Silver Salmon

Oncorhynchus kisutch (on-cor-AIN-cus KEY-such)



A school of marine-phase adult Coho salmon.
Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

Coho Salmon take advantage of smaller rivers and tributaries along the Pacific coast that are too small for larger Pacific Salmon species such as Chinook. As a result, they are a popular sport fish in the Puget Sound and can sometimes be found in urban settings if cold, clean, year-round water is available.

Coho spend almost half of their life cycle (18 months) rearing and feeding in freshwater. Juveniles migrate to the ocean in the spring where the remainder of their life cycle is spent in the Pacific Ocean and its estuaries.

Some stocks of coho salmon migrate more than 1,000 miles in the ocean, while other stocks remain in marine areas close to the streams where they were born.



Two spawning-phase Coho males fighting.
Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Average weight: 8 - 12 pounds

Average length: 24-30 inches

Record setting Coho adults are as long as 42 inches and weigh as much as 36 pounds.

Commonly called "Silver Salmon", Coho in marine environments have dark metallic blue or greenish backs with silver sides and a light belly. When they return to freshwater to spawn, adults are dark with reddish-maroon coloration on the sides.

Spawning adults can be distinguished from Chinook Salmon by the lack of black spots on the lower lobe of the tail and by their white gums.



Coho salmon fry. Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

DIET: Young Coho Salmon feed on plankton, crustaceans and insects. Adults that forage in estuarine areas eat other juvenile salmon species, especially Pink and Chum Salmon, as well as small sablefish. While in the ocean, they switch to eating squid and small fish such as anchovies, sand lance, sardines and herring.

CONSERVATION: While some populations of Coho Salmon along the west coast are healthy and robust, others are ESA-listed as endangered or threatened.

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