

Pink Salmon a.k.a. Humpback Salmon

Oncorhynchus gorbuscha (on-cor-AIN-cus GOOR-bew-sha)



Female (front) and male (rear) Pink Salmon.
Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

Pink Salmon have the shortest lifespan of all Pacific Salmon, completing their life cycle in just 2 years. As a result, there are genetically distinct populations of odd-year and even-year Pink Salmon.

Their redds (or nests) are located close to saltwater because fry immediately migrate to estuaries once they emerge. The shorter journey increases survival odds. Sometimes, they avoid freshwater and instead spawn in the brackish water found of estuaries.

Pink Salmon were accidentally introduced to the Great Lakes in 1996. Today, they are the only population of Pink Salmon known to complete their entire life cycle in freshwater.



Male Pink Salmon.
Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Average weight: 3 - 5 pounds

Average length: 20-25 inches

Pink Salmon are the smallest members of the Pacific Salmon family.

Marine-phase Pink Salmon are steel blue to blue-green on the back, silver on the sides, and white on the belly.

Their nickname "Humpback Salmon" comes from the large hump that develops on the backs of spawning males. While males develop a hump and become dark and red on the back with brownish green blotches on the sides, females lack a dorsal hump and are less distinctly colored.



Pink salmon male (rear) and female (front). Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

DIET: Pink salmon feed on small fish and crustaceans, aquatic insects and squid. The crustaceans that Pink Salmon consume are what gives their flesh its pink color.

CONSERVATION: Although Pink Salmon populations have decreased in some areas, the global population continues to remain steady. In Alaska, they are the most abundant Pacific salmon species.

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