



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL



SAFMC RELEASE PROJECT



PC: Don DeMaria

IDENTIFYING THE SHALLOW WATER GROUPERS



PROJECT CONTACT:
Julia Byrd
julia.byrd@safmc.net

safmc.net/cit-sci/safmcrelease/

Updated: 3/30/2022

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR FISHERY AND HELP COLLECT DATA ON RELEASED FISH

The SAFMC Release project empowers bottom fishermen from all sectors to provide details about released shallow water grouper species (Black, Gag, Yellowfin, Scamp, Yellowmouth, Red, Coney, Graysby, Red Hind, and Rock Hind) and Red Snapper. This information is used to inform which species are being released, what length they are, and how many survive. Participating in this citizen science initiative is as easy as Reel, Record, Release!



Reel

Whether you fish commercially, recreationally, or for-hire, do what you do best and catch those fish!

Record

Record the length, depth, optional location, any shark interaction, or descending device usage in the SciFish mobile app.

Release

Use a proper release technique to increase the fish's chance of survival and your chance of catching it another day.

GET INVOLVED

Visit the SAFMC Release webpage: safmc.net/cit-sci/safmcrelease

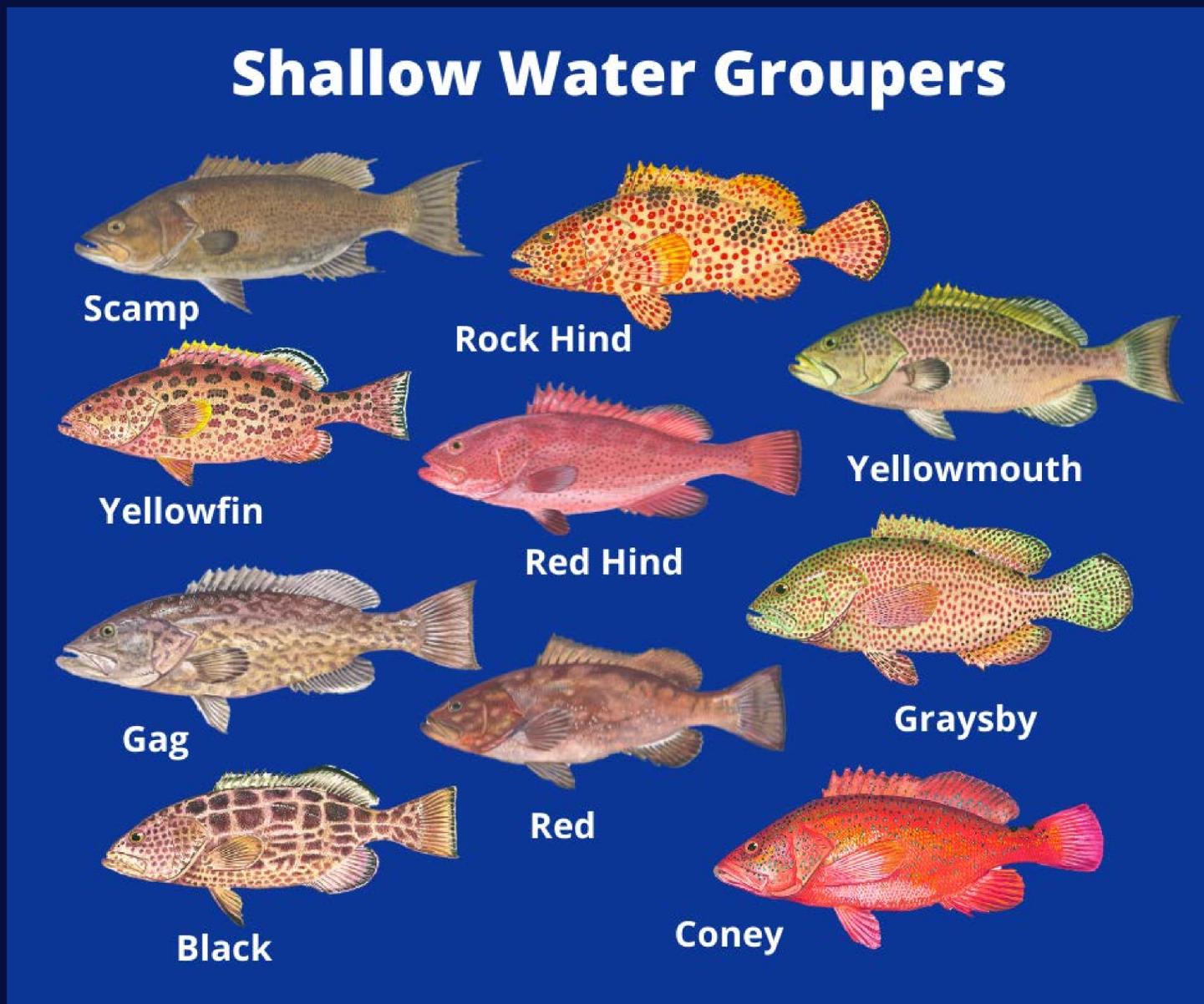
- Create an account by filling out the [online form](#).
- Download the free SciFish mobile app in your respective app store.



- Log in using the account information emailed to you.
- Start contributing to the knowledge of our grouper and Red Snapper fisheries.
- Contact Julia Byrd at Julia.byrd@safmc.net for more info.

Meet the Shallow Water Groupers

The shallow water grouper complex contains 10 different grouper species: **Black, Gag, Yellowfin, Scamp, Yellowmouth, Red, Coney, Graysby, Rock Hind, and Red Hind.**

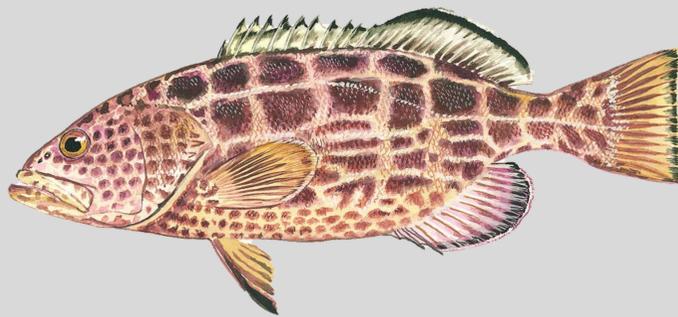


The following pages provide photos and tips to help identify individual species and ways to help distinguish between some of the species that look similar.

If you have any doubt on the species, take a picture and send it to julia.byrd@safmc.net and include it in your SAFMC Release data entry.

Additionally, the [Fish Rules app](#) contains images and ID tips you can use while you're on the water.

Black Grouper



Other Common Names: Carbuerita, True Black

Body Color and Pattern

- Body color can vary from a light gray to brown or black
- Distinct orange/brassy spots on face and belly
- Typically covered in rectangular blotches, pattern can appear faint

Fin Shape and Pattern

- Square, flat caudal fin with slight curvature at the top and bottom; most fins have dark margins

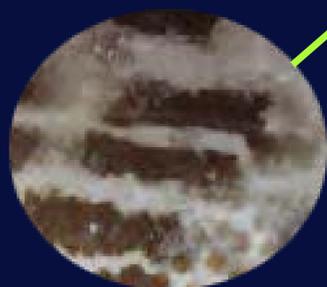
Other Identification Tips

- Found throughout the South Atlantic; most commonly caught in Florida; smaller juveniles can be found in estuaries or inshore
- Not likely to be greater than 50 inches

fins with dark margins



orange/brassy colored spots on head and abdomen.

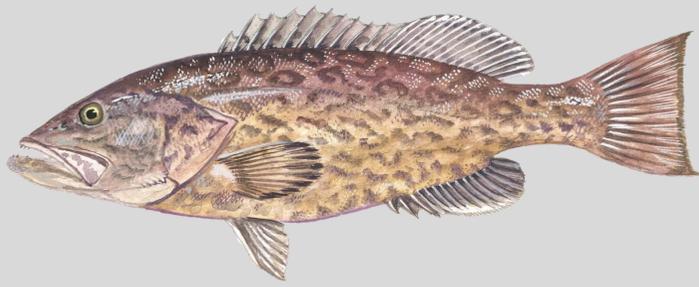


rectangular blotches



different color variations

flat edged caudal fin with slight curvature at top and bottom



Gag Grouper

Other Common Names: Copper Belly, Black Belly, Charcoal Belly, Gray Grouper, Freight Train

Body Color and Pattern

- Body color can vary from pale to dark gray / olive brown
- Body covered in "kiss marks" or worm pattern; pattern can vary by individual
- Older fish can present a black belly

Fin Shape and Pattern

- Square, flat caudal fin

Other Identification Tips

- Smaller juvenile fish can be found in estuaries and inshore waters
- Not likely to be greater than 45 inches



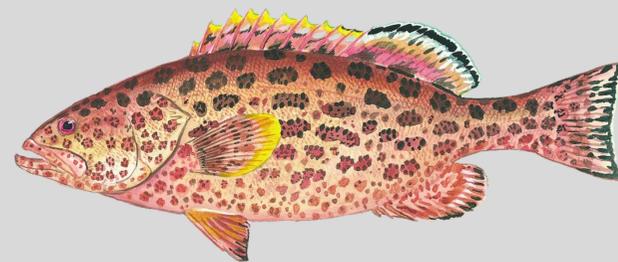
color and pattern intensity differences

irregular "kiss - marks"



flat edged caudal fin

Yellowfin Grouper



Other Common Names: Fireback, Rockfish

Body Color and Pattern

- Body covered with rectangular blotches that can vary in intensity with smaller reddish orange spots all along body
- Upper body or back can appear bright red

Fin Shape and Pattern

- Pectoral fin edged in yellow
- Square caudal fin

Other Identification Tips

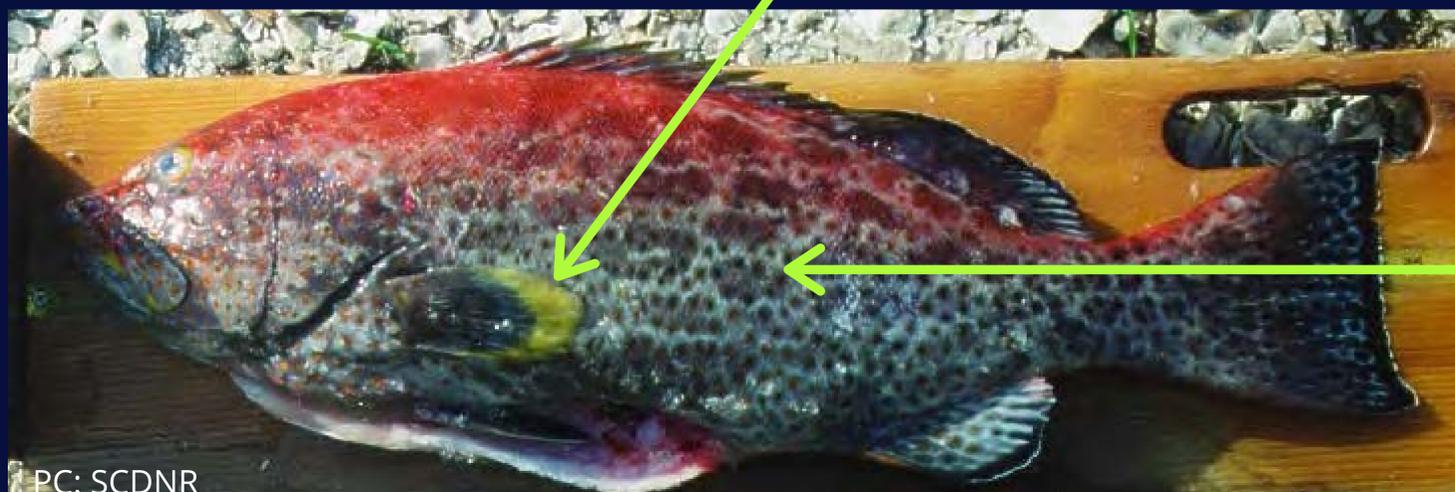
- Not likely to be greater than 45 inches



PC: K. O'Donnell

less intense rectangular blotches

yellow edged pectoral fin



PC: SCDNR

rectangular blotches; reddish orange spots all along body

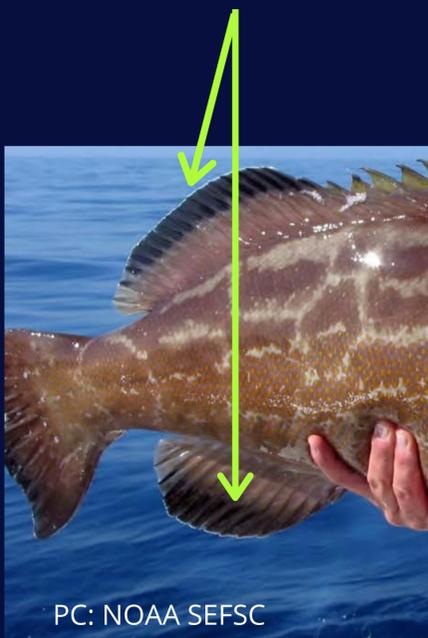
Black vs. Gag vs. Yellowfin

Black Grouper

- Rectangular blotches body pattern with orange spots on head and belly



- Black margins on fins



Gag Grouper

- "Kiss-mark" or worm body pattern
- No orange spots along body



- Entire fin typically appears dark



Yellowfin Grouper

- Rectangular blotches of varying intensity with orange spots all along body
- Back can appear bright red



- Yellow edge on pectoral fin



Scamp Grouper



Other Common Names: Broomtail, Greeneyes

Body Color and Pattern

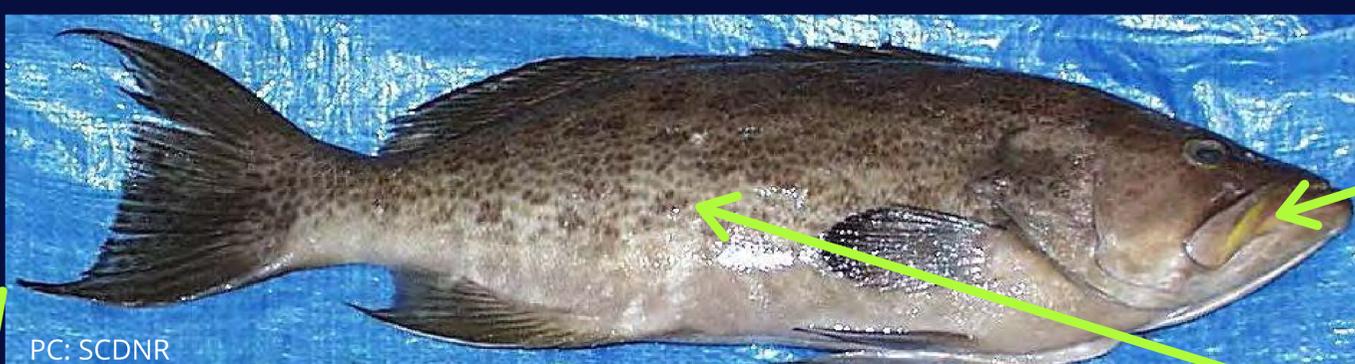
- Body color light gray to brown and covered in reddish brown spots; younger individuals have "cat paw" markings
- Yellow coloration on corner of mouth

Fin Shape

- Broom shaped tail with the longest fringes on the top and bottom
- Pointed anal fin with long filament

Other Identification Tips

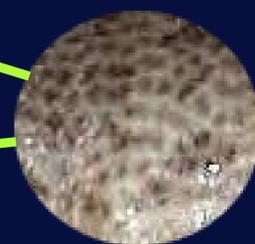
- Not likely to be greater than 41 inches



yellow mouth



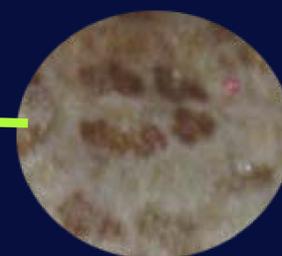
broom tail



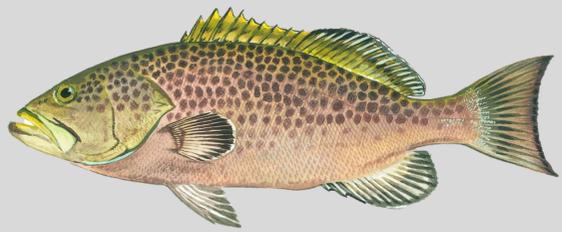
dark brown spots



pointed anal fin with long filament



"cat paw" marks on a younger fish



Yellowmouth Grouper

Other Common Names: Bastard Scamp

Body Color and Pattern

- Body color tan to brown with close set, dark spots
- Spots typically more poorly defined than Scamp
- Corner and inside of mouth yellow
- Sometimes have 6-8 bars on body

Fin Shape

- Center of caudal fin is saw-toothed
- Slightly rounded anal fin

Other Identification Tips

- Not likely to be greater than 41 inches



PC: NOAA SEFSC

saw-toothed tail

rounded anal fin

yellow mouth and lips



PC: SCDNR

Scamp vs Yellowmouth Grouper

Scamp

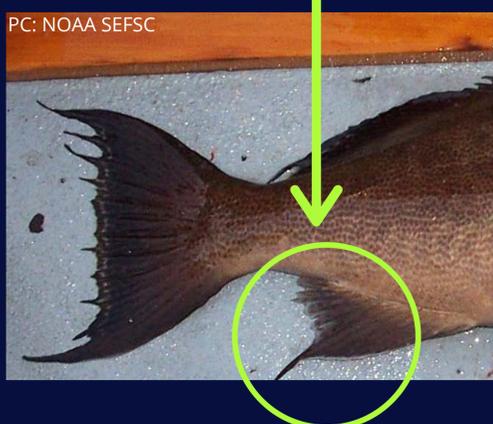
- Dark brown spots and "cat paw" blotches



- Broom tail with long fringes on top and bottom



- Pointed anal fin with long filament



Yellowmouth

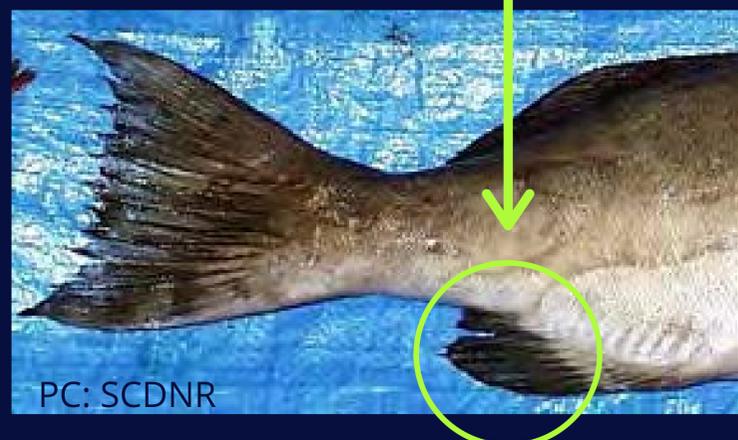
- Brown body color with dark spots typically more poorly defined than scamp



- Saw-toothed tail without fringes on top and bottom



- More rounded anal fin





Red Grouper

Other Common Name: Puddinghead

Body Color and Pattern

- Body color can vary and tends to range from a rust red color to a light brown
- Can often have white unorganized spots or blotches

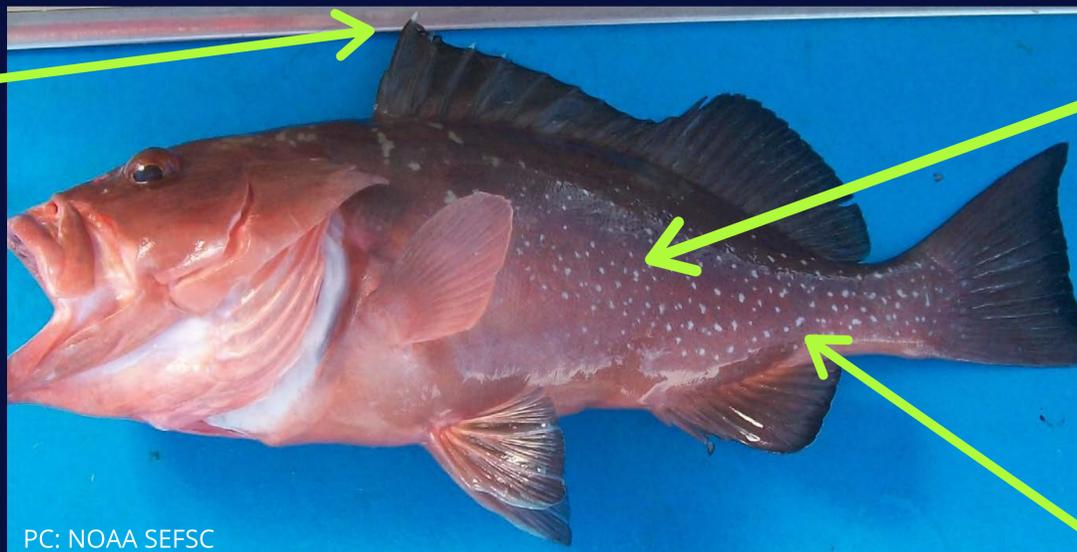
Fin Shape

- Square, slightly concave caudal fin; second dorsal spine the longest

Other Identification Tips

- Not likely to be greater than 41 inches

second dorsal spine the longest



dark red coloration with unorganized white spots



color variations from dark red to light brown



Coney



Other Common Names: Strawberry Grouper

Body Color and Pattern

- Multiple color phases which include red, orange-brown, yellow, and bi-color (red on top, white on bottom); most often seen as reddish-orange with small light colored spots

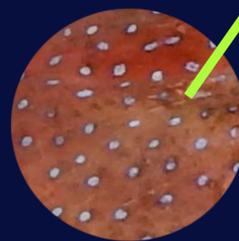
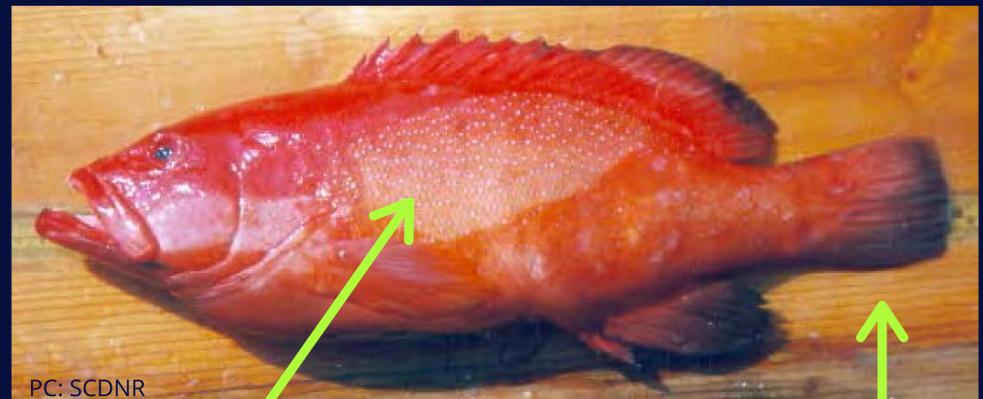
Fin Shape

- Square, flat caudal fin

Other Identification Tips

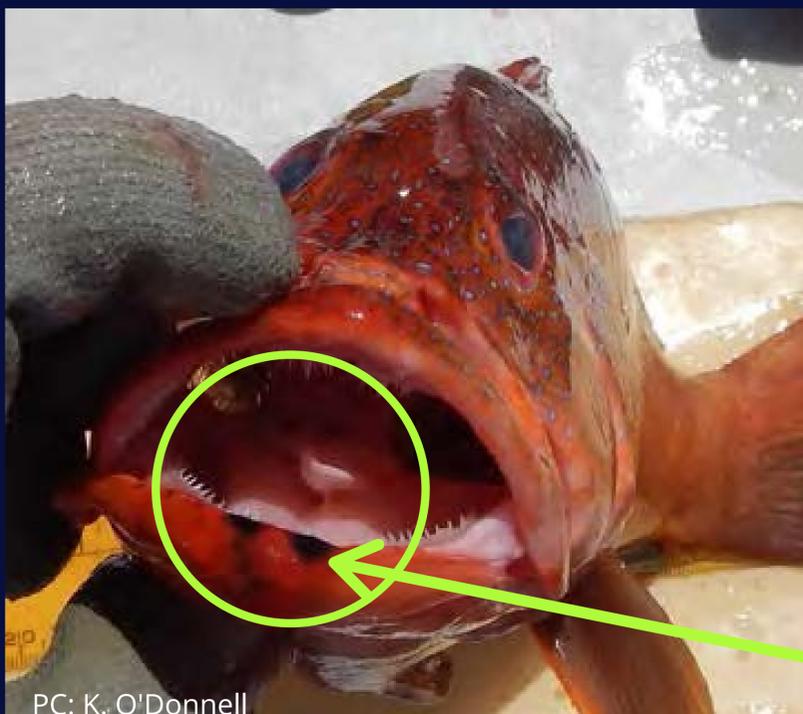
- Regardless of the color phase, Coney have two black spots on the lower lip and top of the caudal peduncle
- Not likely to be greater than 18 inches

different color phases

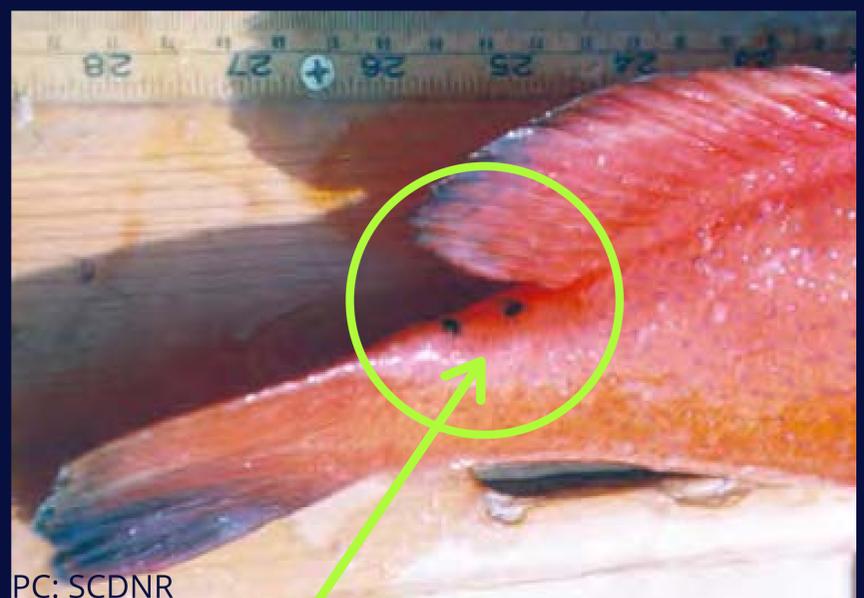


light spots

square caudal fin



two black spots on bottom lip and caudal peduncle





Graysby

Other Common Names: Strawberry Grouper

Body Color and Pattern

- Body typically tan in color and covered in red spots; spots uniform in size across body and go out to the tip of the fins

Fin Shape

- Rounded, convex caudal fin

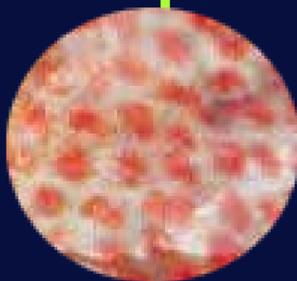
Other Identification Tips

- 4 distinct white or black spots along the base of the dorsal fin
- Not likely to be greater than 20 inches

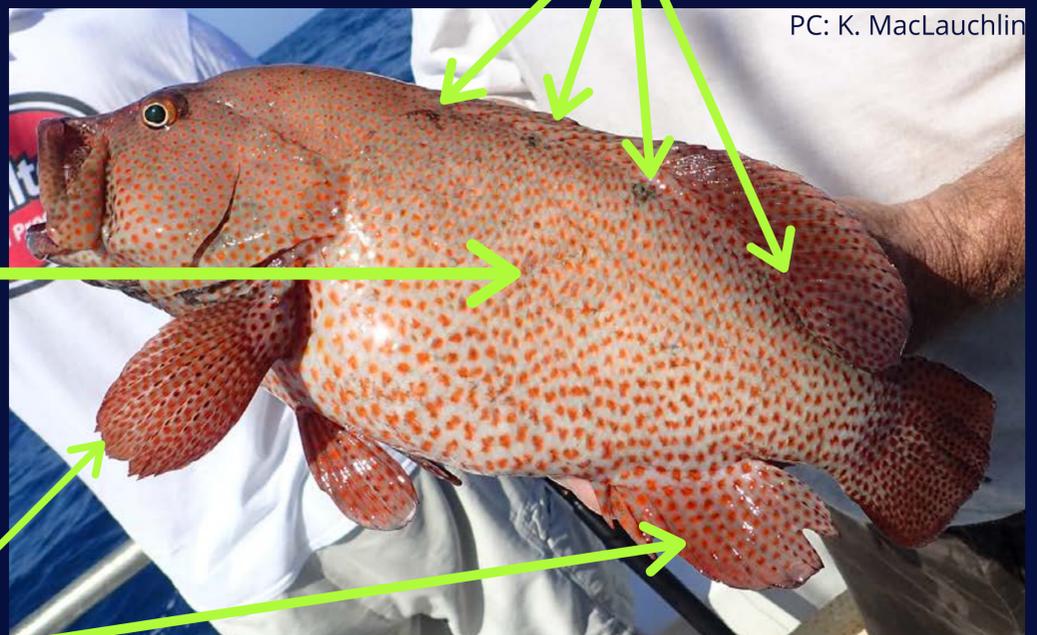


4 distinct black (or white) spots

rounded caudal fin



red spots



red spots go to end of fins

Red Hind



Other Common Names: Strawberry Grouper

Body Color and Pattern

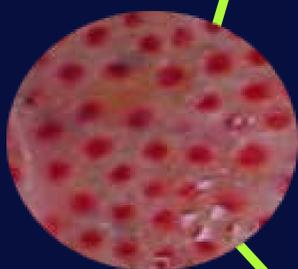
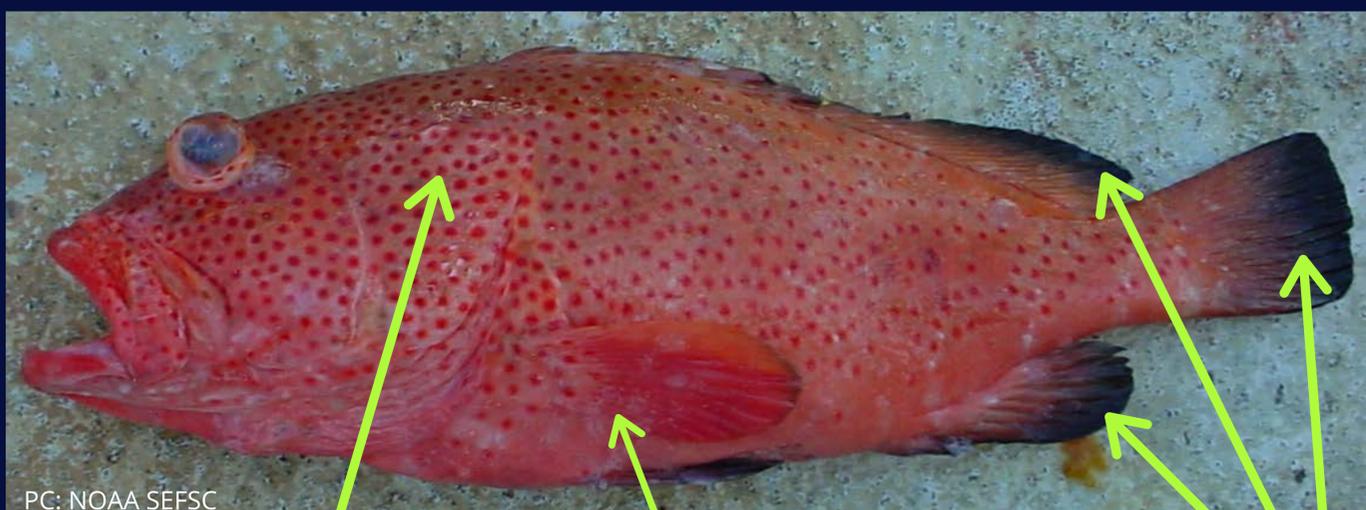
- Body coloration ranges from tan to bright red
- All individuals covered in uniform red spots

Fin Shape and Pattern

- Square, flat caudal fin; fins have dark margins; spots stop at fin margins

Other Identification Tips

- Not likely to be greater than 24 inches



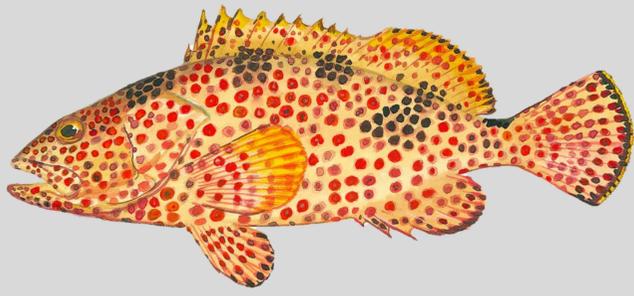
red spots

spots stop at fin margins

fins with dark margins



square caudal fin



Rock Hind

Other Common Names: Strawberry Grouper, Green Bean

Body Color and Pattern

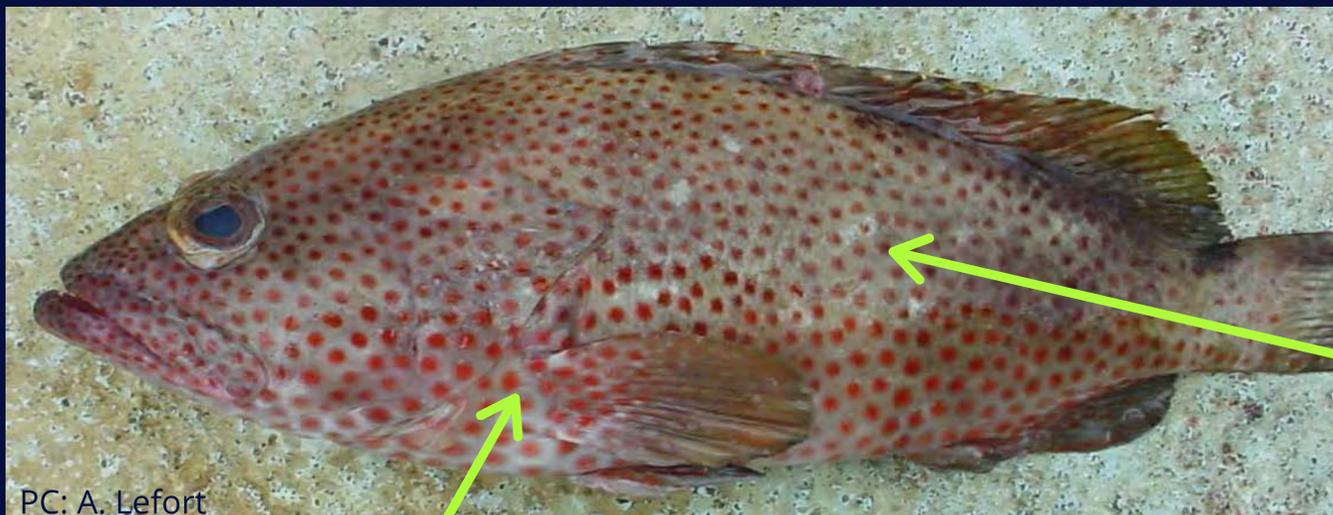
- Body color is typically grayish brown and covered in red spots, which get larger towards the underside of the fish
- Distinct dark saddles along the base of the dorsal fin and/or caudal peduncle

Fin Shape and Pattern

- Square, slightly convex caudal fin; fins have a yellowish-green color; spots stop at fin margins

Other Identification Tips

- Not likely to be greater than 24 inches



PC: A. Lefort

red spots

Dark marks along base of dorsal and caudal peduncle



PC: SCDNR

yellowish - green fins;
red spots stop at fin margins

square,
slightly convex
caudal fin

Coney Graysby Red Hind Rock Hind



Coney

- Red body, light spots
- 2 black spots on lower lip and caudal peduncle



- Square, flat caudal fin

Graysby

- Tan body, red uniform spots; spots to end of fins



- 4 black or white spots along the base of the dorsal



- Rounded, convex caudal fin

Red Hind

- Red to tan body with red uniform spots; spots stop at fin margins



- Fins with dark margins



- Square, flat caudal fin

Rock Hind

- Grayish brown body, red spots that grow on belly; spots stop at fin margins



- Black markings along the base of the dorsal fin and caudal peduncle



- Square, convex caudal fin; yellow green fin color

References

Photos and identification tips were provided by Kelli O'Donnell and the **NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center** Trip Interview Program, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and Fritz Rohde and the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries.