

Pacific Salmon Facts

What is the difference between a salmon and a trout?

There are many differences, but one major difference is that salmon are anadromous while most trout are not. Anadromous fish hatch in freshwater, then at some point they migrate to the ocean to feed and grow into an adult. This can take 1-5 years depending on species. Then they return to their freshwater home streams to spawn and produce offspring. Anadromous salmon die after they spawn. Trout stay in freshwater their whole lives and can spawn multiple times. Steelhead are unique because they are an anadromous type of rainbow trout. Steelhead can spawn more than once, though many die after their first spawning event. The Coastal Cutthroat Trout is also anadromous.



How big is the biggest salmon? How small is the smallest?

The Chinook is the largest salmonid. Chinook can grow to be up to 58 inches long and 120 pounds! The smallest salmon is the Pink, which is usually between 3.5-5 pounds.

How fast can salmon swim?

A migrating sockeye salmon can swim for long periods at an estimated speed of one body length per second. For a 24 inch fish that is 1.4 miles per hour! However, over short distances of burst swimming, the speed can be five or more body lengths per second, which is at least 7.0 miles per hour. That's a fast fish! However, when the salmon is swimming upstream against a strong river current the speed can be much less.

How high can a salmon leap?

Chinook, Coho, and Sockeye can jump as high as eight feet. Chum and pink salmon usually jump no more than three feet.

What predators eat salmon?

Juvenile Salmon: larger trout, adult salmon, sculpins, squawfish, crows, northern pikeminnow, mergansers, osprey, kingfishers, terns, gulls, other birds, seals, and harbor porpoise.

Adult Salmon: Eagles, gulls, seals, whales, halibut, dolphins, porpoises, wolves, bears, and people.

Why do salmon turn different colors when they spawn?

In the ocean salmon are a silvery color. When they leave the ocean to head back to their native streams, other skin pigments appear. Scientists think that spawning colors may help salmon find members of their own species to mate with.

How does a salmon find its home stream?

Scientists believe salmon use an inner magnetic compass to navigate at sea. Salmon can also sense day length, which tells them when the seasons are changing. As a migrating salmon approaches its home stream, it uses its sense of smell to find the familiar smell of the stream it lived in as a juvenile. This migration back to their home is a result of "home stream imprinting" that occurred as the juvenile salmon grew in its home stream and began its migration to the ocean.

What habitat conditions do salmon need?

Different types of salmon need slightly different habitat conditions to spawn. However, they all need water that is clear, clean, and cool.

How long do salmon stay at sea?

Different species stay at sea for different periods of time. However, keep in mind that juvenile salmon migrate to the estuary or ocean in the spring, and after spending 1-6 years in the ocean, they typically return to their native streams in the late summer or fall. So, if a salmon spends one year at sea, what that really means is they spent two complete summers at sea (spring through fall of the next year).