



Description

**Range:** The king mackerel is a bony fish of the family Scombridae. This mackerel is found in the western Atlantic from New England to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

**Habitat:** A pelagic fish, the king mackerel is found from the shore to 200-meter depths. This species is found in oceanic waters and seldom ventures into brackish waters. Juveniles occasionally use estuaries.

**Feeding and Behavior:** King mackerel feed throughout the water column on other fishes such as herrings, jacks, and drums. Some shrimp and squid are also eaten. A schooling species when young, larger fish occur in small groups or singly and are often found around structures such as wrecks and oil rigs.

**Reproduction:** The spawning and nursery areas of king mackerel are located throughout the range. Spawning takes place from May to November.

**Movement:** King mackerel migrate in the spring from south Florida to the northern Gulf. During the cooler fall season, migration occurs from the northern part of the Gulf to south Florida. Large fish (14 kilograms and larger) are found off the Louisiana coast in the winter, especially near oil rigs.

**Fisheries:** The large winter concentrations of king mackerel in the Florida Keys and southeast Florida are the basis of a major commercial fishery. There is also a commercial fishery in Mexico off Veracruz and the northern Yucatan Peninsula. When king mackerel move to the northern Gulf, they are fished primarily by recreational fishermen. (See legend note for details.) Catches are marketed both fresh and frozen.

**References:** Beaumariage, D.S., 1973; Berrien, P., and D. Finan, 1977b; Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 1981 b; Naughton, S.P., and C.H. Saloman, 1981.

- Adult Area (Year-round)
- Migration (Spring)
- Migration (Fall)
- Commercial Fishing Ground\*
- Recreational Fishing Ground\*\*

Adult area is also spawning area from May to November and year-round nursery area.

\*Seasons for commercial fishing are as follows:  
A. Ft. Myers Beach to Key West – December to March  
B. Jupiter to Palm Beach Inlet – December to March  
C. Ft. Pierce to Sebastian Inlet – November to April  
D. Southwest coast of Louisiana – Year-round  
E. Southwest Gulf – Spring and Fall  
F. Northern Yucatan coast – Fall and Winter

\*\*Seasons for recreational fishing are as follows:  
1. Texas – May to August  
2. Louisiana – November to March  
3. Mississippi, Alabama – April to November  
4. Pensacola to Cape San Blas – June to September  
5. Cape San Blas to Tampa Bay – March to August  
6. Tampa Bay to Florida Bay – March to August  
7. Florida Keys – December to February  
8. Miami Beach to Cape Canaveral – December to February; June to August  
9. Cape Canaveral to Fernandian Beach – May to August

References

Beaumariage, D.S., 1973; Heald, E.J., 1970; Manooch, C.S. III, 1979; McEachran, J.D., and J.H. Finucane, 1979; Messenger, J.F., pers. comm.; Moe, M.A., Jr., 1963; Sutherland, D.F., and W.A. Fable, Jr., 1980; Williams, R.O., and D.F. Sutherland, 1979; Wollam, M.B., 1970.

Strategic Assessment Branch  
Ocean Assessments Division  
Office of Oceanography and Marine Assessment  
National Ocean Service/NOAA  
and the  
Southeast Fisheries Center  
National Marine Fisheries Service/NOAA