

LIFE CYCLE OF FISHES

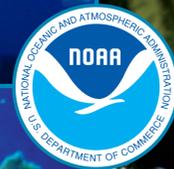
Can you match the larvae with their juvenile and adult forms?



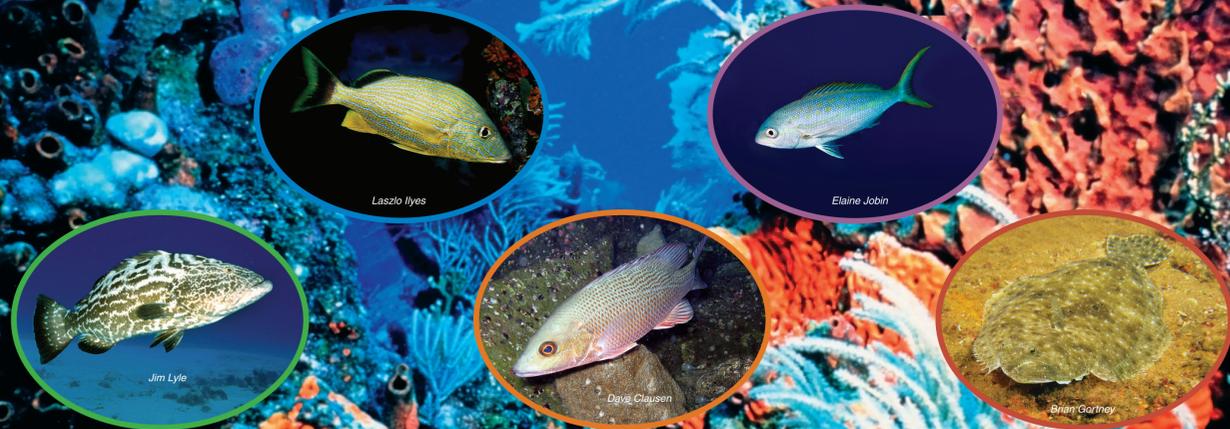
OFFSHORE - LARVAE



SEAGRASS - EARLY JUVENILES



CORAL REEF - ADULTS



MANGROVE - LATE JUVENILES



Help protect crucial habitats and the marine life they support

Key: Black grouper (*Mycteroperca bonaci*); Gulf flounder (*Paralichthys albigutta*);
Bluestriped grunt (*Haemulon sciurus*); Gray or mangrove snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*); Yellowtail snapper (*Ocyurus chrysurus*).

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Habitat

Healthy habitats are essential during all stages in a fish's life. Habitat is more than a place to live because it provides/incorporates prey availability, shelter from predators, and suitable reproduction areas that may improve survival of progeny. Many fishes use different habitats during their life cycle; for example, many snapper may spawn in open water on coral reefs or offshore forming spawning aggregations made up of hundreds and even thousands of fish. The fertilized eggs and larvae may drift as plankton for days or weeks. Eventually, only a fraction of the eggs survive the larval stage and larvae that find an appropriate habitat will settle out of the plankton successfully as new "recruits" into nursery grounds such as seagrass beds. Later, juveniles may move to the mangroves or hard bottom areas. Finally, adult snapper often migrate to coral reefs or other offshore habitats. This commercially important species can survive only if each of these habitats is available and healthy.

Habitat Conservation

Many key habitats are environmentally sensitive and easily affected by human activity. Mangroves and seagrass beds are sensitive to threats brought on by coastal development, land-based sources of pollution, and damage by boats. In South Florida, sudden changes in temperature and salinity due to flood control and nuclear power plants can impact important nursery grounds. Coral reef habitats are affected by many factors such as: pollution, global warming, ocean acidification, removal of key species (overfishing, aquarium trade, keystone species), proliferation of invasive species (lionfish, zebra mussels), and damage caused by anchors and boating accidents. Marine Protected Areas are conservation and management tools that are used to study and protect reproductively important areas. If we wish to enjoy these natural areas and the life they support, we must all do our part to help conserve them for future generations.



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