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Bottom fishing off Oregon

P. Heikkila

Many people who come to the Oregon coast each year to fish for salmon miss a good bet by not also fishing for the less glamorous bottom fish. Bottom fishing has some real advantages.

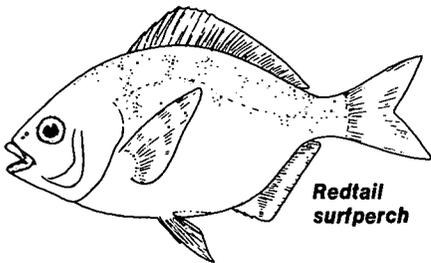
There are numerous varieties of bottom fish; they're abundant; and they're very good eating. In fact, some people prefer a fillet of lingcod to one of salmon.

Although anglers catch bottom fish frequently from boats that fish the nearshore reefs, they also catch them readily by casting from rocky headlands and from jetties.

A note on licenses and bag limits. An angling license is required to take and land marine fish. In addition, marine fish are subject to daily catch limits. These may change annually; be sure to familiarize yourself with current regulations of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Catch limits and license requirements apply outside 3 miles if you plan to land the fish in Oregon.

Surfperch

The six species of midwater surfperch are probably the fish most commonly caught off rocks and beaches and in bays. Of the six, anglers commonly take three: the redbtail surfperch, the pile perch, and the striped seaperch.



Redtail surfperch

The redbtail, which you can easily recognize by its pale reddish pelvic fin and tail, is most commonly found in the surf zone along open ocean beaches, although you may find it occasionally in bays around rocks and pilings.

Fishing for redbtails in the surf requires a fairly heavy spinning or casting rod capable of casting 2- to 5-ounce sinkers. Use a two-hook "fish-finder" rig baited with mussels, pile worms, clams, or shrimp (see the diagram of the fish-finder rig).

The pile perch—largest of all surfperches—has a dark vertical stripe on each side, while the striped seaperch has orange and blue horizontal stripes on the head and body. These two are the most commonly caught surfperch in Oregon's bays. Both fish prefer rocks or kelp pilings, where they feed on the abundant marine life.

Fishing for pile perch and striped seaperch requires a different technique from fishing for the redbtail. Around pilings or from a dock, tie the hook (#4 or #6 bait holder) directly to the end of an 8- to 10-pound test monofilament line. Add one or two large split shot weights, 24 to 30 inches above the hook.

After baiting with mussels, clams, pile worms, or mudshrimp, lower your bait directly alongside the pilings. Then watch your line closely—these fish have a light bite.

Around rocks, a lighter version of the fish-finder rig works well. Use as light a sinker as possible.

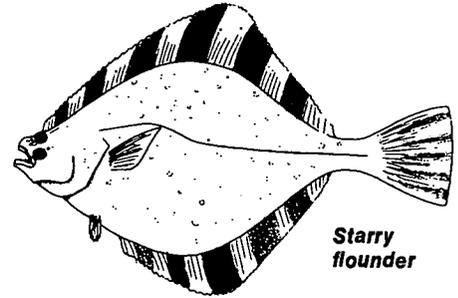
Flounder

There are a number of species in Oregon waters, but only two are important to the angler, the starry flounder and the sand sole. Both are found in abundance in Oregon estuaries from late winter to midsummer.

You can identify the sand sole by its sandlike skin and long, free rays on the forward part of the dorsal fin. The starry flounder has rough plates on its skin and black and orange stripes on its fins.

To catch both fish, use a light fish-finder rig baited with clams, shrimp, pile worms, mussels, or pieces of fish. Drift it over a sand or sand-mud bottom.

The starry flounder is a favorite of Oregon anglers because of its large size (up to 3 feet) and its excellent flavor.



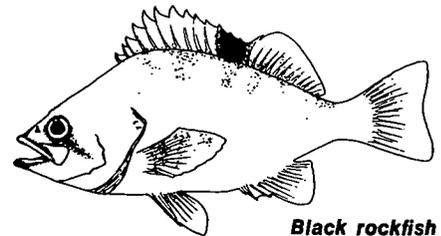
Starry flounder

Black rockfish

Of the numerous species of rockfish found in Oregon waters, anglers most commonly catch the black rockfish because it frequents shallow, nearshore water around rocks, jetties, and kelp beds. It's also called *sea bass*, *black snapper*, or *rock cod*.

Black rockfish are popular because they readily take artificial lures. At certain times, particularly at night, they will take surface lures.

One of the most productive means of catching them is to cast lead-headed, feathered, or plastic worm jigs over submerged reefs or jetties. Retrieve the jigs in short hops over the rocks (see the diagrams of lures and baits and of jigs and jiggling). Spoons, plugs—sometimes, even large flies—



Black rockfish

Paul Heikkila, Extension marine agent, Oregon State University.

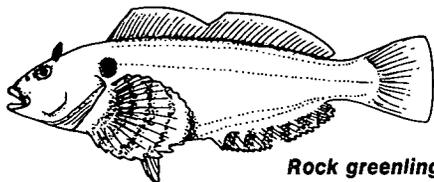


have been used successfully to catch black rockfish.

Herring, live shiner perch, shrimp, and pile worms are all natural baits used to take rockfish. Keep these baits moving slowly over the bottom.

Greenling

Anglers take three common species, also called *sea trout* or *kelp cod*. Greenling have small mouths, fleshy flaps on top of their heads, and long, connected dorsal fins. They're usually found around rocks or kelp, sometimes several miles up a bay.



Rock greenling

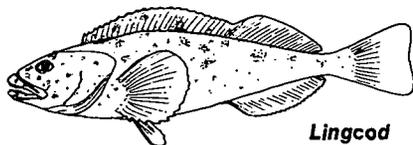
Use a light fish-finder rig, with small hooks (#4 or #6), baited with ghost shrimp, pile worms, mussels, clams, or bits of fish. Occasionally, small feathered jigs or wet flies, worked slowly over the bottom, will catch greenling.

Lingcod

The most prized of all the fish that anglers take from the rocks, a lingcod can give an exciting account of itself. Lingcod sometimes weigh as much as 75 pounds.

Lingcod have wide mouths, large teeth, and long, connected dorsal fins. They inhabit rocky areas and kelp beds. Unlike rockfish or surfperch, they do not form schools.

Lingcod are quite aggressive and will bite a wide variety of baits and lures. Jigs, large spoons, plugs, or herring retrieved close to the bottom will all take lingcod. One special technique uses live bait—small (4- to 8-inch) greenling, rockfish, or flounder.



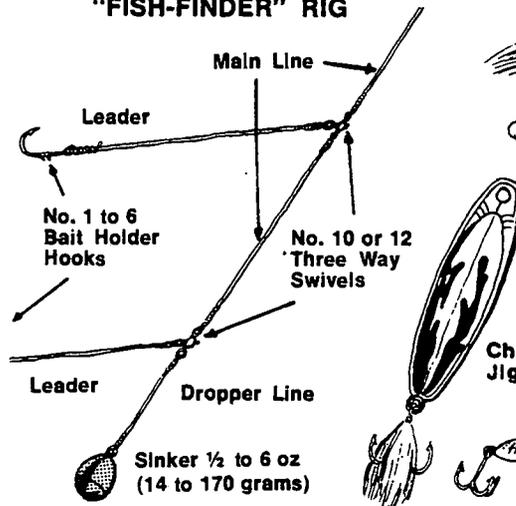
Lingcod

Use large hooks (5/0 or 6/0) and hook them through the lips or behind the dorsal fin. Cast, without any added weight, over the rocky reefs that lingcod frequent. As the small fish, hindered by the large hook, swims erratically toward the bottom, it's tempting prey for a hungry lingcod.

After a pickup, wait a few seconds for the lingcod to swallow the bait before setting the hook.

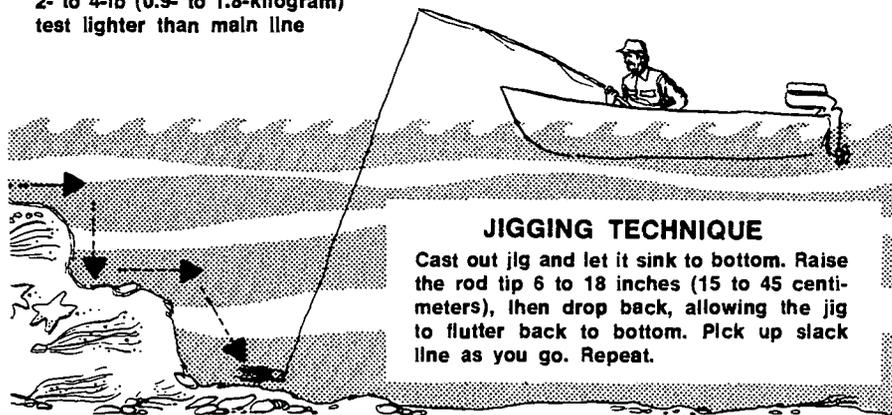
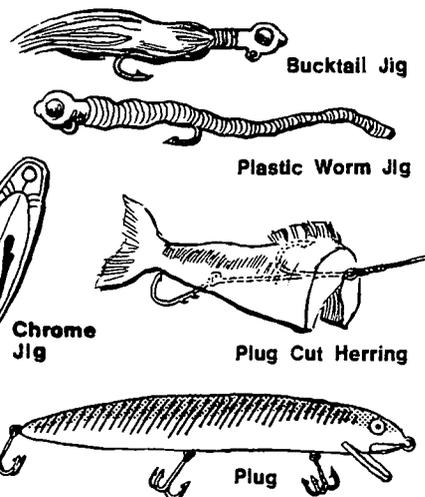
Because of their large size and the rocky areas lingcod frequent, most anglers use

"FISH-FINDER" RIG



Leaders and dropper lines are 2- to 4-lb (0.9- to 1.8-kilogram) test lighter than main line

LURES & BAITS



JIGGING TECHNIQUE

Cast out jig and let it sink to bottom. Raise the rod tip 6 to 18 inches (15 to 45 centimeters), then drop back, allowing the jig to flutter back to bottom. Pick up slack line as you go. Repeat.

stout rods and 20- to 40-pound test line when lingcod fishing.

Others

Although anglers most commonly take these bottom fish near rocks and jetties, they do take other species occasionally—including sculpins, other rockfish, skates, tomcod, other surfperch, and blennies.

A good source of information is *Field Guide to Common Marine and Bay Fishes of Oregon* (Oregon State University Extension/Sea Grant Program and Agricultural Experiment Station, Manual 4). For a single copy, send \$1.25 plus 25¢ postage to: Agricultural Communications, Publications Orders, Oregon State University, Corvallis 97331-2119.

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