

Species at Risk



in Nuu-chah-nulth Ha-houlthee

Rockfish and Olympia Oysters

Uu-a-thluk is partnering with the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk (AFSAR) to let communities know what species at risk live in Nuu-chah-nulth Ha-houlthee. Knowing where they live and how to protect them is the first step towards stopping their decline and helping them to recover. To read other articles in this series or to read our species at risk guidebooks, please visit www.uuathluk.ca/communications.

Canary Rockfish (χisuuh)

Canary rockfish are brightly coloured, with stunning orange and yellow mottling and one notable white stripe running from head to tail.

Found from the Gulf of Alaska to Baja California, with populations all along the WCVI, Canary rockfish spend most of their time near the bottom of the ocean, hanging out around rocky areas where currents are strong. Most young Canary rockfish live in shallow water, moving deeper once they get older. They feed mainly on krill and other small fish. Like other rockfish species, Canary rockfish can live to an old age; one was recorded to be 84 years old.

Canary rockfish have been commercially fished since the early 1880s and are also harvested in recreational and Nuu-chah-nulth food and ceremonial fisheries. Canary rockfish are classified as overfished in the United States, are classified as threatened by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife (COSEWIC) in Canada, and are currently being reviewed for listing by Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA).

Yelloweye Rockfish (χhapiih)

Yelloweye rockfish, also known as red snapper, are one of the largest rockfish. Their name comes from their remarkable yellow eyes, second only in brilliance to their red bodies which change to bright orange in adulthood and pale yellow in old age. As with Canary rockfish, they are found from the Gulf of Alaska to northern Baja California, but generally reside in shallower waters than Canary rockfish. Yelloweye rockfish are one of the world's longest-living fish, with a maximum recorded age of 147.

In British Columbia, there are two distinct populations of Yelloweye rockfish: the outside population (the waters off WCVI) and the inside population (the waters east of Vancouver Island). Yelloweye rockfish live in rocky areas near overhangs, crevices, caves, and boulder piles.

Due to their large size and high-quality fillet value, Yelloweye rockfish have been commercially fished since the late 1800s. They are declared overfished by the National Marine Fisheries Service in the United States, as well as special concern by COSEWIC. SARA is currently reviewing Yelloweye rockfish as a candidate species for listing, and it is expected that they will be classified soon.

Because most Yelloweye rockfish do not reach sexual maturity until between 16 to 20 years of age, it is believed that population recovery will take many decades.

Did You Know? Rockfish, in general, are one of the very few bony fish to birth live young.

Olympia Oysters (χuxχux)

Olympia oysters are B.C.'s only native oysters and are found on the west coast of North America between Southeast Alaska and Panama. They were a staple diet for Nuu-chah-nulth for thousands of years until they were nearly fished to extinction in the 1800-1900s by immigrant Europeans.

In B.C., Olympia oysters are found in the Strait of Georgia, on the WCVI, and around Queen Charlotte Strait and Sound.

Olympia Oysters are considered a world-class culinary delicacy and are eaten locally as well as abroad. Although Olympia oysters were nearly fished out, their populations are now considered to be low but stable in both Barkley and Clayoquot Sounds. With a relatively short lifespan of only 10 years, both COSEWIC and SARA have declared Olympia oysters a species of special concern.

Did You Know? The Olympia oyster matures at the age of one year as a male oyster. It then morphs between male and female for the rest of its life.

Canary Rockfish



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photo © DFO Canada

Yelloweye Rockfish



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Olympia oyster



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