Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet
Pacific Halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*)

The following short article is from the *Oregon Coast 101 Species* collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

Come visit us!

Tourism and Business Development College of Business,
Oregon State University Extension - Oregon Sea Grant at
http://tourism.oregonstate.edu/

Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional Program
https://www.GORPguide.org

For more information about the GORP training program see:
https://www.gorpguide.org/become-a-gorp-certified-guide

Halibut: Pacific (Hippoglossus stenolepis) and California (Paralichthys californicus)

tourism.oregonstate.edu/halibut-pacific-hippoglossus-stenolepis-and-california-paralichthys-californicus/

By colliek2 September 3, 2020

What kind of fish is always looking up? A Halibut.

The first time you see a halibut could be a surprise. Halibut are flatfish with eyes on one side of their bodies and some are giant!

Photo courtesy of ODFW

Things are looking up

Halibut don't start out as a one-sided. As a larva, halibut have eyes on both sides of their head. As they begin to mature, their left eye migrates over their snout to the right side of their head. They begin swimming one-sided which facilitates living on or near the ocean floor. They are always looking up. Hunting.

But wait, there's two

There are two varieties of halibut off the southern Oregon coast: California (*Paralichthys californicus*) sometimes known as California Flounder and Pacific (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*). The two are very different. If you pull in one that is over 30 lbs. there is a good chance that it is a Pacific.

What if they are smaller?

It gets harder to identify them when they are smaller. The easiest way to identify them is to compare the lateral line shape. Pacific halibuts have a straight lateral line; California have an arched that goes above the pectoral fin.

Halibut Comparison:

Let's dive a little deeper for more comparisons.

Pacific	California
Lateral line is straight	Lateral line arches above the pectoral fin
Eye-side is greenish-brown to dark brown or black with lighter blotches; Blind side is white to milky-white.	Eye-side is usually solid brown to black. Can change skin color patterns to blend in with the ocean floor.
Right eyed; mouth extends only to the front edge of the eye.	Eyes can be on either right or left; usually left; mouth extends past the eye.
Diamond shaped bodies are more elongated than most flatfish; tail is double truncated.	Rounder shape, flat
One of the largest halibuts (can weigh up to 500 lbs. and grow to over 8 ft long). Average catch in Oregon: 25 lbs. round weight.	Typically weighs 6 to 30 lbs.
Found all along the Pacific coast. Oregon is on the southern end of the range and fish are smaller. Want larger fish? Head north to Alaska.	Rare north of Coos Bay.
Lives on or near ocean bottom; strong swimmers; migrates long distances.	Lives on or near sandy ocean bottom; strong swimmers
Feeds on fishes, invertebrates (such as crabs, clams, squids), and other invertebrates.	Feeds on fishes (not just bottom),some invertebrates (such as octopus, crab and shrimp), and sometimes even seals.
Live bait, daily and annual bag limits	Live bait; daily bag limit

REFERENCES:

–Oregon Dept. Fish and Wildlife, MyODFW (https://myodfw.com/articles/2019-halibut-newsletter#pacific)
–US Fish and Wildlife Service (https://myodfw.com/fishing/species/pacific-halibut and /species/California-halibut)
–Wikipedia, Pacific Halibut (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_halibut)
–Fish Watcher (https://www.fishbase.in/summary/514)
–National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Studying bottom-dwelling fishes and crabs of the Eastern Bering Sea Shelf," BobLauth(https://archive.fisheries.noaa.gov/afsc/Science_blog/EBS_6.htm)