

Sockeye Salmon a.k.a. Blueback Salmon

Oncorhynchus nerka (on-cor-AIN-cus ner-ka)



Male Sockeye Salmon. Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

Sockeye prefer to spawn in rivers that have a lake in the system. It's common for them to lay their eggs along lake beaches in addition to rivers and streams.

Most populations of Sockeye Salmon are anadromous with fry born in lakes spending 1-3 years in freshwater before migrating to the ocean. Fry born in rivers and streams generally migrate to the ocean soon after leaving their redds (or nests).

Kokanee Salmon, are Sockeye Salmon that do not migrate to the ocean and instead live out their entire lives in freshwater systems. Kokanee salmon rarely grow longer than 18 inches.

Sockeye Salmon are well known for their bright orange flesh and are often considered the most flavorful of the Pacific salmon species.



Two male Sockeye Salmon. Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Average weight: 4 – 15 pounds

Average length: 18-31 inches

Anadromous populations of marine phase Sockeye Salmon have iridescent silver flanks, a white belly, and a metallic green-blue top, giving them their "Blueback" name.

As they return to freshwater to spawn, their heads turn green and their bodies turn bright red. Males develop a humped back and hooked jaws filled with tiny, visible teeth.



Male (left) and female (right) Kokanee Salmon. Photo by Roger Tabor, USFWS

DIET: Juveniles feed on plankton, insects and tiny crustaceans. In the ocean they maintain the same diet, occasionally supplementing it with squid and small fish.

CONSERVATION: Sockeye populations in Alaska are thriving. Two populations on the west coast are ESA-listed. The Snake River population is listed as endangered while the Ozette Lake population is listed as threatened.

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