

## *Hemiramphus brasiliensis* (Ballyhoo Halfbeak or Bally)

Family: Hemiramphidae (Halfbeaks)

Order: Beloniformes (Flyingfish and Needlefish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



**Fig. 1.** Ballyhoo halfbeak, *Hemiramphus brasiliensis*.

[<http://biogeodb.stri.si.edu/caribbean/en/contributors/images/576?>, downloaded 24 October 2016]

**TRAITS.** The ballyhoo halfbeak is also simply called the ballyhoo, or bally as known by locals in Trinidad and Tobago. The ballyhoo has a cylindrical elongated/streamlined body with an extended lower jaw and a shorter upper jaw. It has a blue dorsal colour, with the rest of the body being silver except for the parts of the dorsal and caudal fins and the tip of the lower jaw, which are yellow (Fig. 1). It has a common length of 35cm and a maximum length of 55cm and maximum weight of 200g (Fishbase, 2016). At maturity females are larger in size than male ballyhoo; females were 21.5cm while males were 20.8cm (Oliveria et al., 2013).

**DISTRIBUTION.** The ballyhoo halfbeak has a widespread distribution range in the eastern and western Atlantic (Fig. 2). The western Atlantic includes from Massachusetts USA to the Gulf of Mexico, all the way to Brazil, including the Caribbean Sea. The eastern Atlantic includes the Cape Verde islands, Senegal to Angola (Fishbase, 2016). Ballyhoo do not migrate but instead make seasonal movements when necessary.

**HABITAT AND ECOLOGY.** Ballyhoo are inshore surface-layer fish that live only a few metres from the sea surface. They form large schools and feed on algae, seagrass, plankton, decapods, copepods, siphonophores and smaller fish. This means ballyhoo are omnivores and can eat at different levels of a food web. They have a short life span of four years but are an abundant species.

**REPRODUCTION.** *Hemiramphus brasiliensis* reproduce by spawning; a 100g female ballyhoo will produce an average of 1164 eggs. This number is low for the family Hemiramphidae, however they have a high spawning frequency which makes up for their initial low fecundity. The highest levels of spawning occur during March to July, but reproduction occurs throughout the year on a lower level (McBride and Thurman, 2002). Juvenile ballyhoo (Fig. 3) are never alone from the time they hatch as the other fertilized eggs will hatch around the same time.

**BEHAVIOUR.** The ballyhoo halfbeak is a schooling fish. This means that they swim in the same direction as a unit. The benefits of schooling include being able to detect and efficiently get away from predators, more effect foraging efforts, and better opportunity to find a mate. The ballyhoo school at different depths depending on the time of day; at night they school closer to the surface (Wikiwand, 2016).

**APPLIED BIOLOGY.** *Hemiramphus brasiliensis*, is very common in its distribution range. The bally is a fish that is mostly used as bait (Fig. 4); they are cut and used for trolling as they are prey to many fish, resulting in them being very effective in tournaments for sports fishermen. There has been some decline in the number of ballyhoo due to overfishing, but the overall population has not been affected. According to IUCN, it is listed as Least Concern (IUCN, 2016).

## REFERENCES

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**Fig. 2.** Ballyhoo halfbeak distribution map.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=15521927> downloaded 27 October 2016]



**Fig. 3.** Juvenile ballyhoo halfbeak.

[<http://www.delaware-surf-fishing.com/ballyhoo-off-the-beach-in-delaware/>, downloaded 29 October 2016]



**Fig. 4.** Picture of ballyhoo packaged for bait, taken at my mothers' business.

[Original photograph]

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