

Mycteroperca acutirostris (Comb Grouper)

Family: Serranidae (Groupers and Sea Bass)

Order: Perciformes (Perch and Allied Fish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



Fig. 1. Comb grouper, *Mycteroperca acutirostris*.

[http://media.eol.org/content/2015/03/18/00/08612_orig.jpg, downloaded 27 October 2016]

TRAITS. The comb grouper, *Mycteroperca acutirostris*, is identified by a greyish brown colour throughout its head and body, with irregular white spots (Fig. 1). There are 3-4 dark brown lines which spread from the rear of the eye and run along the underside as dark wavy stripes. The fish has a long flat body which grows to a maximum length of 80cm. There are 10-12 anal soft rays, 15-17 dorsal soft rays, 11 dorsal spines and 3 anal spines (Capuli, 2016). Juveniles less than 15cm have a black saddle (Heemstra and Randall, 1993).

DISTRIBUTION. The comb grouper can be found in the western Atlantic in areas such as Texas, the north-western Gulf of Mexico stretching to Venezuela and central Brazil (Fig. 2). It is noted that the recorded distribution is not consistent, this species being found in several separate areas (Bertoncini et al., 2008).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. Adult comb groupers are found within reefs, inhabiting rocky bottoms, and the young ones live among soft corals, turtle grass beds, mangroves and in shallow areas (Bertoncini et al., 2008). The average weight of an adult is 4kg, and they move around in groups feeding on smaller fish and squid.

REPRODUCTION. Not much is known about reproduction in comb groupers but it is suspected that fish weighing 2kg are still juvenile. They spawn in Brazil during the spring, from September to December. They are non-guarders and open water or substratum egg-scatterers (Heemstra and Randall, 1993).

BEHAVIOUR. Comb groupers are usually found in groups capturing prey in mid water. One notable behaviour observed in the comb grouper is its ability to catch prey by pretending to be sick or dying. The fish would lay on its side moving slightly, and when approached by smaller fish it would strike and consume them. Off the south eastern coast of Brazil a juvenile was observed carrying out this tactic and within 15 minutes it had caught 5 prey (Stephan, 2007).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. Comb groupers are considered important game fish in southern Brazil for spear fishermen and rod-reel anglers, with the largest caught being 10.1kg. Fortunately *Mycteroperca acutirostris* can be found in protected areas of Brazil such as Arvoredo Biological Marine Reserve and Laje de Santos Marine State Park. However fishing still occurs for game and minor commercial purposes and they are vulnerable to exploitation.

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Comb grouper geographic distribution.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=132830>, downloaded 28 October 2015]

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