

## Galjoen 3C

**T**he Galjoen, *Dichistius capensis*, is South Africa's national fish and a favourite catch for many of our country's shore anglers. The name probably derives from the Dutch word for galleon, and refers to the fish's legendary fighting ability when hooked. Galjoen is one of only two species in the family *Dichistidae*, both of which are endemic to southern Africa. The banded galjoen, *Dichistius multifasciatus*, is smaller and prefers subtropical water.

Galjoen have deep, plump bodies covered with small tenacious scales. The underslung mouth is small and surrounded by fleshy lips. Each of the jaws are set with a row of large, curved incisors in front and smaller teeth behind. There are no strong molars, but crushing teeth are found in the gullet. The galjoen varies in colour from silver-bronze to almost completely black, sometimes with stripes. Colours will change according to the fish's surroundings and provide a measure of camouflage. The dorsal and ventral fins, far back on the body, do not fold down and have a distinctive wedge shape.

Galjoen are found from northern Namibia to southern KwaZulu-Natal, where they frequent the turbulent surf-zone, particularly at the interfaces of rock and sand. Due to its highly energetic lifestyle, the flesh of galjoen is packed with blood vessels. These fish often use the waves to gain access to food on exposed rocks.

### Feeding

Galjoen are known to feed on a wide variety of small invertebrates and seaweed that live on rocks. Small black mussels and crustaceans are among their most common prey. They

feed by removing organisms from rock surfaces and their powerful incisors are admirably suited to this purpose. The teeth in the gullet are well adapted for crushing shellfish.

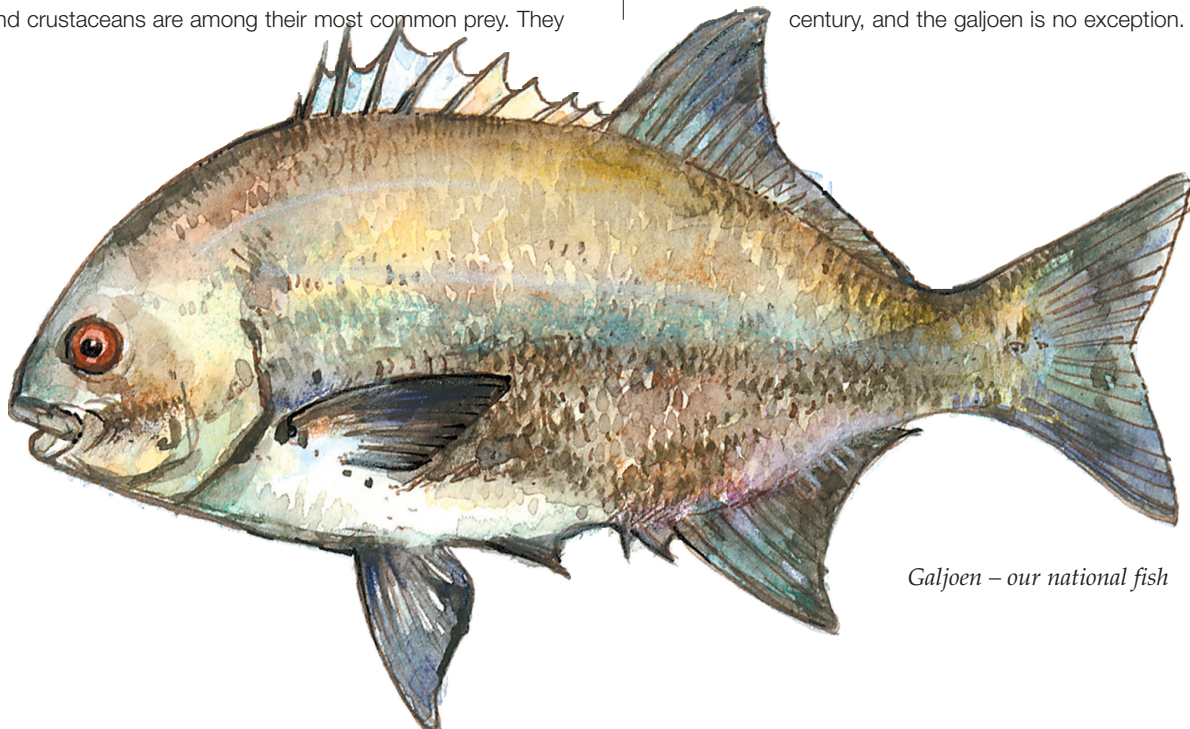
Galjoen usually remain in a small home range for long periods, maybe for several years. But some move out, and tagged fish have travelled as much as thousands of kilometres. It is not known what prompts galjoen to undertake large movements, though food availability and water conditions are likely motivations.

### Breeding

Galjoen are serial spawners which means that they spawn several times in a season. Their breeding extends from October to March, peaking in December. Female galjoen grow faster than the male fish, reaching a maximum length of approximately 670 mm. Males attain 470 mm. Fish of both sexes rarely exceed 13 years of age. Sexual maturity is attained in their fifth year, at which stage females measure approximately 34 cm and males 31 cm.

Females release thousands of eggs. A rough guide is 370 eggs per gram of body mass. A large female galjoen may release 1,3 million eggs at each spawning. Fertilised eggs hatch into larvae, but these have never been located in the ocean, despite extensive sampling. Laboratory experiments have shown that the eggs float, and one can surmise that waves keep them in the surf zone where the young develop. Mortality is likely to be very high during this stage.

Galjoen once occurred in great numbers throughout its range but over the last three decades the population has been dramatically reduced. Fisheries biologists have found a marked decline in the abundance of fish commonly caught by South African shore anglers over the course of this century, and the galjoen is no exception.



*Galjoen – our national fish*



*Galjoen is normally caught from the open beach, in the rough surf zone*

### Fishing regulations

The decline in the abundance of galjoen is the result of over-fishing. In the past, galjoen were caught by commercial anglers and gill netting of galjoen was only restricted after 1974. Bag limits, closed seasons and minimum sizes were introduced later. Today anglers with a recreational permit may take a maximum of five fish per day. The fishing season for galjoen is open between March 1 and October 15 annually. The minimum size that may be caught by anglers is 35 cm. There is no commercial fishery for galjoen and they may never be sold.

### Marine reserves protect galjoen

New evidence has shown that marine reserves play an important role in safeguarding galjoen stocks for the future. The De Hoop Marine Reserve and the Tsitsikamma National Park provide total protection for inshore fish species like the galjoen. As a result adult fish are protected in these reserves and make an important contribution to spawning stock,

although many move out of the reserve into adjacent areas where anglers catch them.

Based on tagging statistics, it was estimated that a net mass of between 10 and 20 tons of galjoen leave the De Hoop Marine Reserve every year. De Hoop is therefore supplying anglers with a steady source of galjoen which will not dry up as angling pressure increases to unrealistic proportions.

*Author: Claire Attwood September 2000*

#### Classification:

PHYLUM:	Chordata
SUBPHYLUM:	Vertebrata
SUPERCLASS:	Pisces – Fish
CLASS:	Osteichthyes – Bony fish
FAMILY:	Dichistidae
GENUS :	<i>Dichistius</i>
SPECIES:	<i>capensis</i>
COMMON NAME:	Galjoen

- FURTHER INFORMATION:** • Van der Elst, R. 1988. *A Guide to the Common Sea Fishes of Southern Africa*. Struik, Cape Town.  
 • Attwood, C.G. and Bennett, B.A. 1993. *Anglers can benefit from marine reserves*. Earthyear. Issue 5.  
 • Ward, C. 1997. *Marine Reserves: Havens for tourists, reserve banks for fishermen*. African Wildlife. Vol 51 no 1.

**RELATED FACTSHEETS:** • Fishing Regulations • Fishing Industry • Geelbek • Spotted Grunter • Kobs • King Mackerel.

