

Lutjanus purpureus (Southern Red Snapper or Red Snapper)

Family: Lutjanidae (Snappers)

Order: Perciformes (Perch and Allied Fish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



Fig. 1. Southern red snapper, *Lutjanus purpureus*.

[<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/32/e7/53/32e753314f5d3c751188f8a2c19fc033.jpg>
downloaded 22 October 2016]

TRAITS. The southern or Caribbean red snapper comes from the Lutjanidae family in which there are over 130 other species of snappers, all with their own unique colours and slightly different physical features. The southern red snapper *Lutjanus purpureus* is distinct for its solid red top and silver belly (Fig. 1). There is some doubt whether the southern red snapper is really a different species from the common red snapper, *L. campechanus*; locally it is simply known as the red snapper. Both forms are similar, and may represent northern and southern populations of the same species. Mature male red snappers are about 27cm while the females are around 39cm in Trinidad and Tobago. The red snapper has 10 dorsal spines and 14 dorsal soft rays. The mouth is large and contains sharp needle-like teeth.

DISTRIBUTION. The southern red snapper is found in tropical and subtropical regions of the western Atlantic from the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea to northeastern Brazil. In Trinidad and Tobago, the red snapper is abundant around the Gulf of Paria, the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, and the Columbus Channel.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. The southern red snapper is found in habitats varying from rocky areas to around coral reefs, where the temperature is around 27°C. Red snappers that live near rocky areas and coral reefs stay between depths of 60-120m. This is why the population of the red snapper is high in Trinidad and Tobago, since the area is a suitable habitat. Mostly they feed on small fish, cephalopods, shrimps and crabs. Growth of the red snapper is generally fast since it grows at least 7cm a year.

REPRODUCTION. Spawning in Trinidad and Tobago takes place between September and February. Red snappers have the ability to begin reproduction at about two years old. They usually spawn around 20 times a year, in open water so the eggs scatter. Bigger and older red snappers can produce a lot more eggs than the younger ones; from no more than 500 eggs to over 1 million eggs. The eggs that are fertilized, float on the surface and hatch within a day.

BEHAVIOUR. Most times red snappers move in groups and this is why they are so easily caught. Juvenile red snappers are distributed widely over sandy or muddy bottoms. Larger red snappers tend to become attracted to wrecks and reefs, and they would hardly move from that area when they are adults.

REFERENCES

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