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## YELLOWTAIL (*SERIOLA LALANDI*)

The record for a California yellowtail is 91.6 pounds, caught out of San Diego by Tom Lambert.

Photo by Bill Depriest

**The yellowtail is a hard-fighting member of the jack family (*Carangidae*) that occupies both inshore and offshore temperate and subtropical waters. Incredibly adaptable, yellowtail can occupy a variety of both demersal and pelagic**

habitats. In Southern California it is not uncommon to find yellows scouring the sea floor around the Channel Islands, patrolling the local kelp beds, breezing in open-water schools, or closely associated with floating objects.

Often times the first big game quarry for young anglers as they begin their saltwater fishing experiences aboard the half-day and three-quarter-day commercial passenger fishing vessels is the yellowtail. They are incredibly aggressive and opportunistic, feeding on a variety of prey items ranging from krill and red crabs to large squid and bony fishes (e.g., mackerel, sardines, smelt). One alluring aspect of the yellowtail is their willingness to consume artificial lures, including heavy jigs, surface iron, or trolled lures.

With thousands of anglers targeting this species throughout spring, summer, and fall months, the yellowtail plays a crucial role in the recreational

fishery dynamics of Southern California. Often times it appears as if the importance of the yellowtail to our local economy is overlooked, as catch rates may be much lower than other species (e.g., calico bass), but the allure of the yellowtail is often the reason the trip was taken. A single yellowtail is often enough to fuel interests and spur an outing to the local kelp beds or offshore waters.

### Age and Growth

In the Eastern Pacific, yellowtail can reach sizes nearing 100 pounds; however, the predominant size classes captured in the local fisheries are much smaller. Typically, a catch consists mainly of fish ranging in size from four to twenty pounds; larger fish are common especially down along Baja and around the offshore islands. Sexual maturity in the wild is reached at approximately two to three years of age

(about seven to ten pounds), while in captivity this species has been shown to spawn in as little as 12 months. Fecundity studies have shown that a 20-pound fish is capable of producing close to one million eggs over the spawning season and that larger individuals are capable of multiple spawns per season.

### Movements

Although this species has several disjunct populations around the world, for the purpose of this article, we will discuss the stock that is common off of the Eastern North Pacific. Tagging studies conducted by the Department of Fish and Game suggest that there are at least two stocks along the Southern California and Baja coast. The northern stock extends down to the island of Cedros, Mexico, while the southern stock extends around Baja into the Sea of Cortez and along mainland Mexico. It is believed that there is some degree of mixing in these two stocks and that most of Southern California's recreational landings are from the northern stock. Although some of our yellowtail likely winter in Southern California,

many of our fish move into local waters from Baja as the water temperatures rise during the spring and summer months. The yellowtail resource in Southern California is highly dependent on local water temperatures, with warm-water years historically providing the highest catches.

### Commercial Fisheries

Since the 1950s, a time when commercial fishers targeted this species with inshore gillnets, live-bait boats, and rod and reel in California, the commercial yellowtail landings have declined significantly. Additional California landings came from purse seine activities conducted below the US-Mexico border. In Mexico the purse seine is still used to harvest yellowtail as well as other inshore schooling species like barracuda (*Sphyrna argentea*) and bonito (*Sarda chiliensis*). Because Southern California lies on the northernmost fringe of the

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yellowtail distribution, it is difficult to answer questions related to stock status and overfishing. It is evident, however, that there has been a shift in the average size of fish landed in Southern California, with the two- to three-year-age classes dominating the catch, as opposed to the six- to nine-year-olds that were much more abundant in the in the late 1970s. Nonetheless, the yellowtail continues to provide Southern California anglers with a prized fish that inspires a great deal of excitement for all ages.

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