

All About Wolffish

What you need to know...



Protectors of Ecosystems

While wolffish may look intimidating, they are actually shy and docile and hunt prey such as sea urchins and shellfish when not hiding away in their dens. Wolffish also play an important role as protectors of kelp beds – a sheltered marine habitat for eggs and young of many species of fish.

“Urchin Barrens” occur when sea urchins overfeed on kelp beds. Wolffish protect these areas by eating sea urchins, keeping the population low enough so that the ecosystem can thrive.

Species at Risk

Within Newfoundland and Labrador waters, there are three species of wolffish that are listed under Canada’s *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*: Atlantic (Striped), Spotted, and Northern.

Often called catfish, abundances for all three wolffish species have been declining in the past 20 years in eastern Canada due to accidental capture by fisheries targeting other species. You can help protect wolffish by carefully releasing them back into the ocean if accidentally caught when fishing.

How to Identify



Atlantic (Striped) Wolffish

SARA Status: Special Concern

Size: up to 152 cm (60 in) long and 22 kg (49 lbs) in weight!

Colour: vertical stripes on the fins and body. Colours range from yellow-brown to purple-blue. Young are yellow-brown with green fins. Flesh is firm.

Depth: nearshore to 918 m, mainly at 150 - 300 m



Spotted Wolffish

SARA Status: Threatened

Size: up to 150 cm (29 in) long and 22 kg (49 lbs) in weight!

Colour: dark spots on fins and body. Colours range from yellow-brown to grey-brown to dark brown. Juveniles are grey-brown or purple. Flesh is firm.

Depth: rarely in shallow areas, mainly at 200 - 750 m



Photo Credits: DFO

Northern Wolffish

SARA Status: Threatened

Size: up to 144 cm (57 in) long and 20 kg (44 lbs) in weight!

Colour: body has no distinct patterns on it and ranges from dark grey to brown to purplish-black at all ages. Flesh is jelly-like.

Depth: greater range than other species, mainly at 600 - 1,000 m

Threats

Incidental capture of wolffish in many fisheries is thought to be the leading cause of human induced mortality. Wolffish distributions overlap fishing grounds, making them a common bycatch in many Atlantic fisheries. Other potential threats to wolffish include habitat alteration/destruction, oil exploration, and pollution but requires further research.

Wolffish Non-disturbance Diving Protocols

SAFETY FIRST!

Wolffish have large, powerful jaws with teeth for crushing shellfish. Keep your distance when diving to ensure that serious injury from bites does not occur.



Common Sightings in NL

- It is unlikely that you will see a Spotted or Northern wolffish while diving as they are typically found in deeper water. Atlantic wolffish are frequently sighted nearshore in NL at depths less than 100 m.
- They can usually be found in a den, crevice, or rocky outcropping on the ocean floor or swimming.



Recommendations for Non-disturbance

- Keep a safe distance from wolffish if you see one swimming or denning to avoid injuring both yourself and the fish.
- Avoid stepping on the seafloor and denning areas. Mind your fin kicks to avoid disturbing wolffish and other wildlife.
- Don't chase wolffish. If it is frightened, give it space, lie low and be still. Wolffish are shy but may come out of hiding if curious enough.

Upload your wolffish sighting to the APP:

Information on your sightings will contribute to research and recovery efforts!

- Download the Survey123 App from the Google Play or APP Store and scan the QR code ->
- OR through your web browser using this link: <https://arcgis/1CHnjP>



Got any photos? You can upload them too!