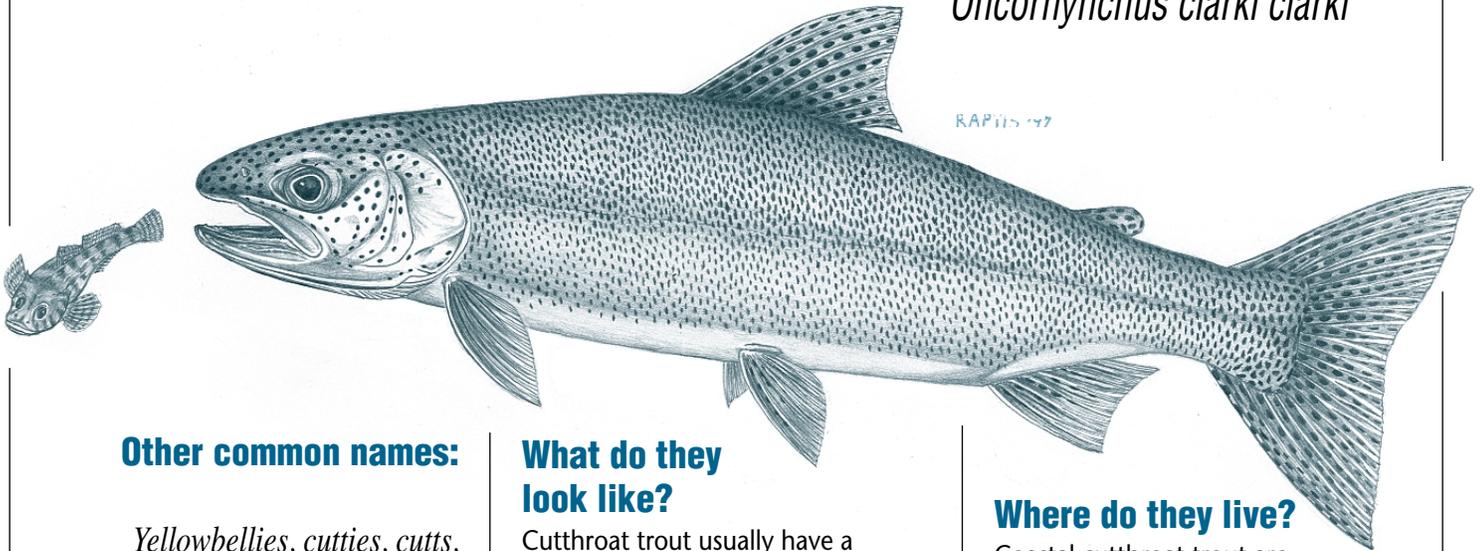


B.C. Fish facts

Coastal Cutthroat Trout

Oncorhynchus clarki clarki



Other common names:

Yellowbellies, cutties, cutts, harvest trout, sea trout.

Maximum length for resident fish: 76 cm
Maximum weight for resident fish: 7.7 kg

Maximum length for sea-run fish: 68 cm
Maximum weight for sea-run fish: 3.6 kg

What do they look like?

Cutthroat trout usually have a distinctive red or orange streak under their lower jaw. This may not be obvious on those found in salt water. Coastal cutthroat differ from all other trout by having many spots all over the sides of the body, on the head and often on the belly and fins. Like all salmonids, they have an adipose fin, a soft, fleshy fin on the back. Sea-run individuals are silvery; sometimes their bellies have a distinct lemon colour, while freshwater fish are usually darker, with a coppery or brassy sheen. The body may have a pale yellowish colouring, lower fins may be yellow to orange-red, and sexually-mature fish often have a rose tint underneath. Unlike rainbow trout cutthroat have small teeth at the base of the tongue.

Where do they live?

Coastal cutthroat trout are found from southern Alaska to the Eel River in California. They do not extend very far inland, usually less than 150 km from the coast. The farthest inland they occur in B.C. is the headwaters of the Skeena River. They occur on all our coastal islands with suitable habitat, and in practically all streams and lakes of the coastal region.

These fish prefer gravelly, lowland streams and lakes. Small, cool, clean streams with gravel are needed for spawning and young cutthroat trout spend up to three years rearing in these streams. Some resident fish have a home territory, sometimes a pool only 18 m long, in which they spend their whole life. Coastal cutthroat also exist as an anadromous form which migrates to the ocean but returns regularly to fresh water to feed or over-winter. Cutthroat trout which migrate to the sea usually remain within

estuaries or near shore, moving in and out with the tides as they feed. Extensive migrations can occur along shoals; individuals can travel 100 km from their natal streams to feeding streams. When mature they return to spawn in the stream where they hatched. Although they usually spawn in the spring, fall spawning is also known to occur.

What do they eat?

Coastal cutthroat are highly predatory, feeding on other fish, but during the salmon spawning season they also eat loose eggs. In the ocean they feed on crustaceans as well as fish. The young feed mostly on insects.

What is their life cycle like?

Coastal cutthroat trout are usually sexually mature at the age of three to four years and spawning occurs from February to May. Eggs are laid and fertilized in a redd, a gravel nest built by the female. After six or seven weeks, the eggs hatch and after another week or so the fry leave the nest and are free swimming. Sea-run cutthroat trout usually migrate into salt water in the late spring or early summer at two or three years of age and return to freshwater in the late autumn or

early winter to feed and if mature to spawn. They can live to a maximum age of about 10 years but few actually survive long enough to spawn more than twice; angler harvest and predators take a heavy toll.

How are they doing?

The coastal cutthroat is a blue-listed species, which means the species is considered vulnerable in British Columbia. Several populations, particularly those on the East coast of Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, near Vancouver, are in serious decline. Many runs are already extinct. Their dependence on small streams for spawning and rearing makes them especially vulnerable, as small streams are easily altered or destroyed and their protection is often overlooked in planning residential, agricultural, and industrial developments or during forest harvesting

How you can help:

- Since cutthroat trout are very susceptible to over-fishing, using a barbless hook and practicing catch and release are recommended.
- It is important to obey angling regulations and habitat protection bylaws, guidelines

and regulations, since they were designed to protect the fish and their habitat. You should also Observe, Record and Report violations of the regulations by phoning 1-800-663-9453.

- Cutthroat trout are highly vulnerable to urban development and agricultural practices that remove streamside

vegetation, alter streamflow, increase sedimentation, nutrient input, and water temperature. If you own property bordering a stream or lake, try to protect or plant native trees and shrubs along the banks which provide shade, capture excess nutrients from fertilizers and manure, and prevent erosion.

- Form a group of water stewards and volunteer to monitor local water quality and other habitat changes in lakes or streams.
- Be aware that what you dump into your septic tank or roadside storm drain may find its way into streams or lakes. Help keep water quality high by using detergents and soaps minimally and do not dump harsh chemicals, such as bleach, paint thinners or antifreeze, into drains.

No kidding!

- Coastal cutthroat were much more abundant in the past. There are accounts of people catching several hundred fish an hour in the Qualicum River on Vancouver Island.

