Yellowtail Rockfish, Olive Rockfish, Widow Rockfish
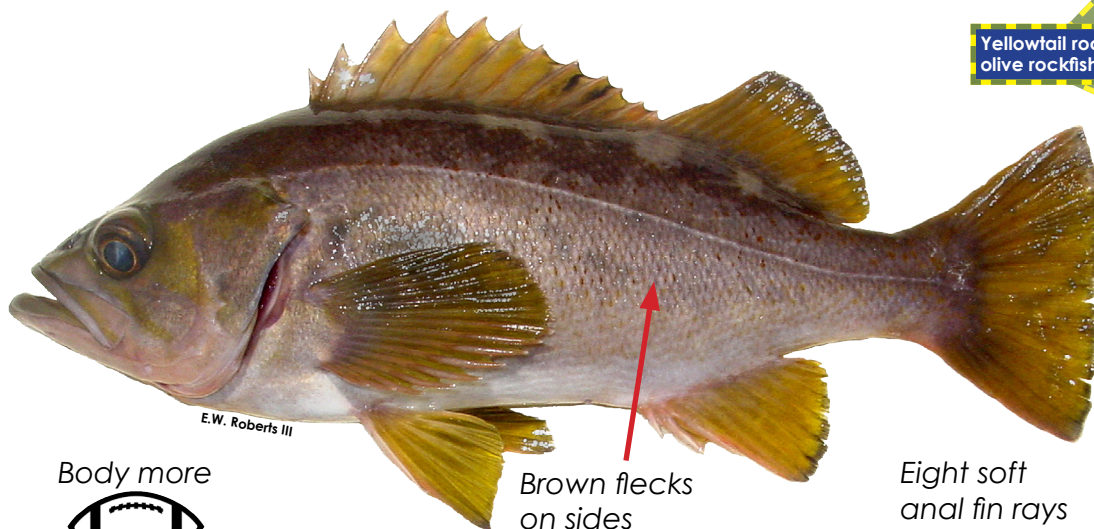
Rockfish Identification

CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
FISH &
WILDLIFE

Yellowtail rockfish, olive rockfish, and widow rockfish are often misidentified. This flyer offers features that can be used to differentiate between the three species.
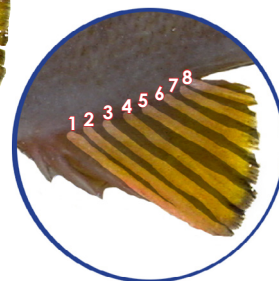
YELLOWTAIL ROCKFISH

"***Shelf Rockfish***" *per CCR T14, Section 1.91(a)(3).*
Common north of Pt. Conception, Santa Barbara County

Yellowtail rockfish more common
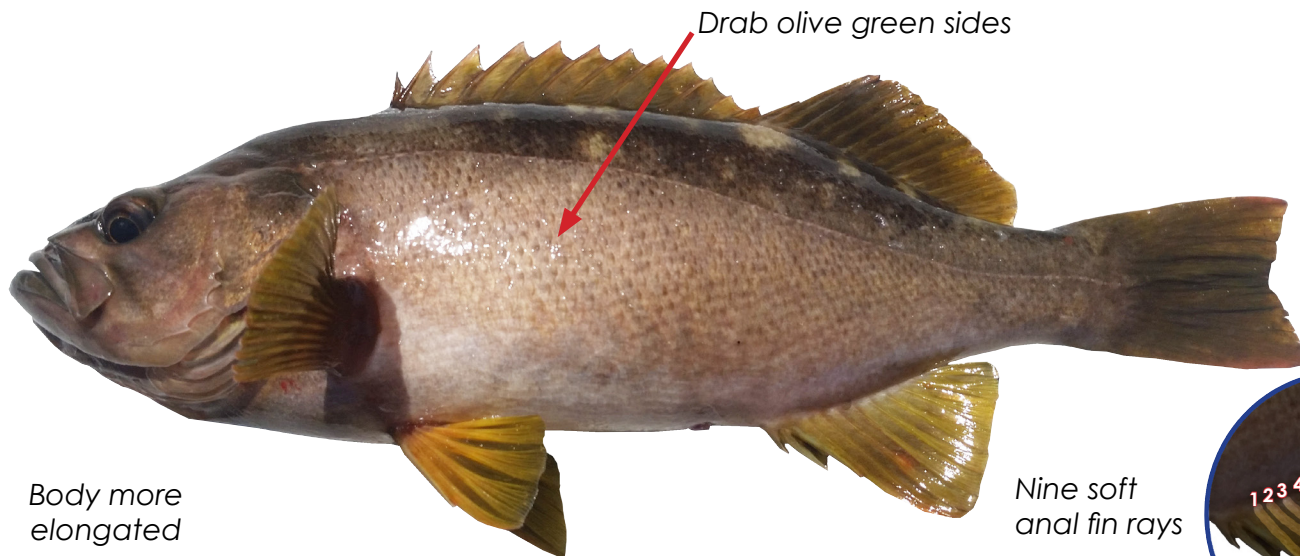
Yellowtail rockfish and olive rockfish common

Olive rockfish more common

E.W. Roberts III

Body more

football-shaped

Brown flecks on sides

Eight soft anal fin rays

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

OLIVE ROCKFISH

"***Nearshore Rockfish***" *per CCR T14, Section 1.91(a)(1).*
Common south of Cape Mendocino, Humboldt County

Drab olive green sides

Body more elongated

Nine soft anal fin rays

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Rockfish coloration may vary, but some characteristics stay the same in each species.
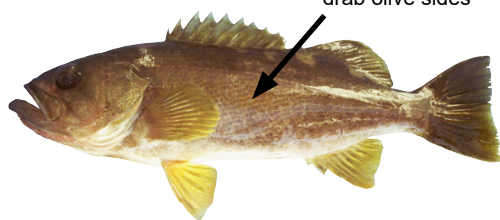
OLIVE ROCKFISH

LOOK FOR: Drab olive sides, anal fin with nine soft rays, body more elongated
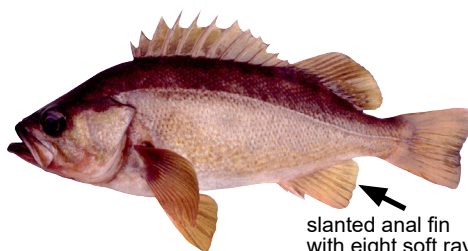
anal fin has nine soft rays
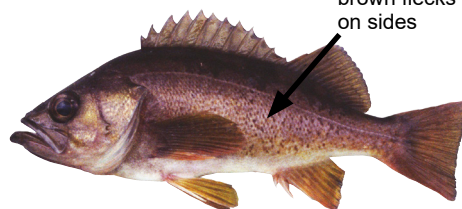
drab olive sides

YELLOWTAIL ROCKFISH

LOOK FOR: Brown flecks on sides, slanted anal fin with eight soft rays, body more football-shaped

slanted anal fin with eight soft rays

brown flecks on sides
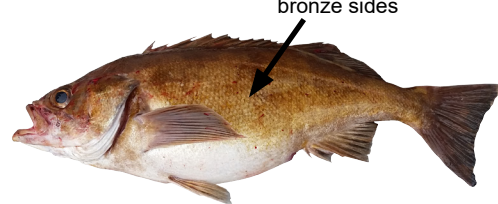
WIDOW ROCKFISH

LOOK FOR: Black fin membranes, narrow where tail attaches to body, slanted anal fin, bronze sides

black fin membranes

slanted anal fin

bronze sides

Narrow where tail fin attaches to body

Angler Best Practices

Know your fish and educate others. Familiarize yourself with the rockfishes in your area through resources such as fish identification books and guides, informational flyers, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) website (wildlife.ca.gov/Fishing/Ocean/Fish-ID), game wardens, and port samplers.

Minimize the fish's injuries. When rockfishes are brought up from depth, decreasing pressure may injure them. These injuries may cause the fish to float helplessly at the surface. Many anglers use a **descending device** to help a released fish regain depth. Visit wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/Groundfish/Barotrauma for more information.

Handle fish as gently as possible. Use wet hands if possible (or wet towels, though they may remove protective slime) and do not touch the eyes. Get the fish back in the water quickly. Consider using barbless hooks, and avoid using treble hooks.

Check before you go fishing! For up-to-date rockfish regulations in your area, visit wildlife.ca.gov/Fishing/Ocean/Regulations/Groundfish-Summary.

CDFW photos courtesy of the CDFW California Recreational Fisheries Survey

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