

North Atlantic Swordfish

Xiphias gladius



Photo Credit: Steve Dougherty

Appearance

- Swordfish have a long, flattened bill that looks like a sword, as their name implies.
- They have a stout, rounded body and large eyes.
- Their first dorsal (back) fin is tall and crescent-shaped. Their second dorsal fin is much smaller.
- Their anal fins (on their belly) are similar in shape to the dorsal fins but are smaller.
- They have a broad, crescent-shaped tail.
- Their color is darkest on top, generally black or brown, and fades to a lighter color below.

Biology

- Atlantic swordfish are one of the fastest predators in the ocean. Their streamlined body allows them to swim at high speeds, up to 50 mph.
- They grow quickly and reach a maximum size of about 1,165 pounds. However, the average size caught in the fishery is 50 to 200 pounds.
- Swordfish live about 9 years.
- Females are able to reproduce between 4 and 5 years of age. Depending on their size, females can produce anywhere from 1 million to 29 million eggs.
- They spawn multiple times throughout the year in warm tropical and sub-tropical waters.
- In the western North Atlantic, they spawn south of the Sargasso Sea and in the upper Caribbean from December to March, and off the southeast coast of the United States from April through August.
- Swordfish feed on a variety of fish and invertebrates such as squid.
- They capture prey by slashing their bill back and forth, stunning or injuring prey in the process.
- They have developed unique characteristics, such as a special eye muscles and a heat exchange system that allows them to swim in deep, cold water in search of prey.
- Swordfish feed at the top of the food chain and are rarely preyed on by other animals. Sharks and larger predatory fishes may sometimes eat juvenile swordfish.

Where They Live

- Swordfish are found around the world in tropical, temperate, and sometimes cold waters of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans.
- They are found in the Gulf Stream of the Western North Atlantic, extending north into the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.
- North Atlantic swordfish annually migrate thousands of miles along the eastern seaboard of the United States and Canada and also in the eastern Atlantic along Africa and Europe.