

SEA GRANT

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If Alabama has no native trout, why do we have four species of fish with trout in their name? There is no definitive answer but several hundred years ago, the term “trout” was probably used to describe any fish that resembled the trout found in Europe and the eastern U.S. Adjectives were added for further description and we ended up with spotted seatrout, sand seatrout, silver seatrout, white trout, and green trout.

Careful readers will note that five trout names were given for four species of fish. That is because white trout is a name commonly used for both sand seatrout and silver seatrout. The two fish look very similar and their habitats overlap.

Sand seatrout are the fish commonly caught in the lower bay in great numbers. Silver seatrout are more abundant further off shores in water 50 ft or deeper. However, the two species overlap in waters of 15 to 50 feet and may be caught together.

As the name suggest, silver seatrout are silver in color and have many very small dark spots arranged in lines that slope diagonally downward. Sand seatrout have a yellowish coloration on the back and fins. The surest way to tell the two apart is to count the soft rays in the anal (belly) fin. A sand seatrout will have eleven or twelve soft rays while the silver seatrout will have nine.

All three of the seatrout (spotted, sand, and silver) are closely related and are in the drum family (Scianidae) along with red drum (red fish), black drum, croaker, and

ground mullet to name a few. True trout are in the salmon family along with their cousins like pink salmon and Atlantic salmon.

The last local “trout” is one of my favorites. When I moved to this area, I thought I knew a little something about fish and fish names. The first time I heard a fisherman talking about catching green trout in the Delta, I was baffled. Later I learned that green trout was the name used by area anglers for largemouth bass. Largemouth bass are not related to trout either and are in the sunfish family along with smallmouth bass, redear sunfish, bluegill, green sunfish, etc.