

**SEA GRANT**

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By

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The most unusual fish at the Alabama Deep Sea Rodeo this year was a speckled hind. Speckled hind are a deep water grouper with a reddish-brown body and numerous white spots. This spotted grouper is found in Bermuda and from North Carolina to Texas. They grow to 60 pounds but most captured specimens are less than 20 pounds. The hook and line record is 52 pounds from Destin Florida. Other common names for this fish include Kitty Mitchell and strawberry grouper.

Like many other groupers, speckled hind are protogynous hermaphrodites. That means that most fish are hatched as females and become males later in life. In the case of speckled hinds, females become mature and spawn at four to five years of age and transition to males between ages seven and 14.

There are at least three reasons that a speckled hind might be considered unusual in our area. First, they live in very deep water (180 – 540 ft) where, until recently, there was little recreational fishing. Second, while little is known about this fish, it is likely that the speckled hind is not common to the waters off Alabama compared to the waters off of Florida. This is true of several other better known species of groupers. Third, the population of speckled hind is thought to be greatly reduced. The National Marine Fishery Service considers this fish to be a “species of concern” and the World Conservation Union has it on its list of threatened species.

These listings are based on fairly dramatic declines in commercial landings of speckled hind, general lack of information about the fish and concerns for grouper populations in general.

One of the most curious things about speckled hind to me is the use of the term “hind” to name a fish. There are two other hinds in the Gulf of Mexico: the red hind and the rock hind. Worldwide, there are about 23 species of grouper with hind in their names. The most common definition for hind (as a noun) is a female red deer but it can also refer to a fawn. Fawns are spotted and most of the grouper with hind in their name are spotted. If you have a better explanation, please give me a call at 438-5690.