

SEA GRANT
Telephone: (251) 438-5690

By
Rick Wallace, Extension Marine Specialist
Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center

The fish that won the most unusual category this year in the Alabama Deep Sea Rodeo was a yellowfin grouper. Although rarely caught in the north-central Gulf of Mexico, this colorful grouper is found from North Carolina to Sao Paulo, Brazil. They are more likely to be seen in South Florida, the Bahamas, and the Caribbean.

Most descriptions of yellowfin grouper include the phrase “color highly variable”. The background or body color is often pale with elongate blotches that may be olivaceous, brown, black, or red. These blotches tend to form longitudinal rows and the blotches are rimmed with smaller dark dots. The lower part of the body may have numerous dots or spots. Fish caught from deeper water are said to be bright red with darker red blotches. The outer one-fourth of the pectoral fin is bright yellow and abruptly delineated.

Like most other groupers, yellowfin grouper begin life as females and after spawning a few years become males. Females mature at 20 inches and by the time they are 26 inches many have changed to males. Also like some other groupers (for example scamp and gag), yellowfin grouper form large spawning aggregations at specific underwater banks or humps.

Juvenile yellowfin are found in shallow turtle grass beds. Adults are found on rocky areas and coral reefs in depths of 30 to over 400 feet.

The yellowfin grouper is one of about 14 species of grouper that are managed in the Gulf of Mexico. The length limit is 20 inches and anglers generally catch yellowfin in the 20-pound range. The Florida State record is 34 pounds and the world record is 42 pounds caught in Louisiana.