

Southern Nomad



Salmon

Arripus truttaceus

Australian Salmon are not what you would call great eating but they are definitely one of the most fun mid size fish to catch. More than just acrobats, salmon use their wide, strong shoulders to fight harder than almost any other fish you can catch from the beach or rocks in southern WA.



THIS PICTURE: Margaret River has some very secluded beaches where light tackle fishing for salmon is extremely exciting
BELOW INSET: Trolling Halco Scorpions around Rottnest Island is a productive way to target salmon through April and May



Of the two species found in Australia, WA is lucky enough to get the largest of them and each autumn signals the start of the annual run up the coast. Salmon are a true sportfish and, once you look past them as a table fish, there are few others that can match them.

Scientific Information

Just like the fish we call a herring, the Australian salmon is actually a type of perch and the WA fish is a slightly different species to the east coast Australian salmon. It is believed

that they were named by early settlers after the fish they most resembled.

Australian salmon (not to be confused with the pink fleshed Atlantic salmon not found in WA) is very closely related to the herring or tommy ruff. Herring is a commercially

fished species but is nowhere near as important to professionals as the salmon.

Indeed, juvenile salmon so closely resemble a herring that the only way the average angler can tell them apart is through their eyes. Herring have a much larger eye than



a salmon, which have small eyes in comparison to most pelagic fish.

Salmon have breeding grounds in Esperance and Albany, but usually come on their breeding migration up the WA coast to end up around Rottneest Island. The fish gather in mid-summer around the south east coast and migrate north, spawning in March and April each year.

The ocean current then takes the eggs south, ending up around South Australia in some cases but others don't make it out of WA. As the warm, summer waters around Perth cool, large schools invade the metropolitan area and we get a couple of months of salmon fever.

How to Catch Them

During the months of March through to May, the stretch of coast between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin usually holds good numbers of salmon, but you need to move around from spot to spot to find the fish.

There is an old saying too: "When you hear about it, it's often too late." This means people leave it too late before their first trip for the year in search of them. Traditionally, people associate Easter with salmon and, although there are schools around, the bulk may have already moved through on their journey closer towards Perth's waters.

As salmon migrate through the Yallingup to Dunsborough region during March, their eyes on the prize of a bit of the old how-ya-goin' when they arrive in Perth, the schools move quite slowly. For those that haven't seen this sight before, it is simply mind blowing.

Imagine a tight ball of salmon the size of your lounge room, much bigger at times, slowly working its way within casting distance up the beach, towards Perth. A trick of the trade is to use polarising sunglasses and to carry a pair of binoculars to keep an eye on

any potential schools working their way up from further down the beach.

Just don't get caught looking in the same direction as nude bathers, as they're just not going to believe you that you're searching for salmon schools instead of "white pointers" ... trust me.

The schools look like reefs but wait, are they moving slowly north? Yes! It's salmon!

through Dunsborough and, although many fish can still be caught, you have to work a lot harder. Firstly, you have to try and keep up with the faster moving schools which test your stamina in the soft sand. Secondly, these fish have one thing in mind - getting back towards Albany and Esperance, having bred their little backsides off, so it can be a little more challenging to



ABOVE: Ben Patrick from Halco with a monster salmon caught using the very productive Trembler from shore

The longer you leave your trip, the harder it will be to catch fish, as once the salmon have completed their spawning they head south and this is commonly known as the back-run. Unlike the salmon which are heading north in tight schools at a slow and steady pace, the same back-run fish move much faster.

By mid to late April, these salmon are well and truly heading south

tempt a fish into engulfing your lure.

We should highlight that the Yallingup to Dunsborough region is prone to big swells, and rock fishing in particular can be very dangerous. Always remember that king waves are a common occurrence during these time periods. Some of the areas on the western side that are prime salmon locations include Canal Rocks, Smiths Beach, Torpedo Rock and Sugarloaf Rock.

Smiths Beach is a safer location in rougher conditions and the salmon are certainly easier to spot over the white

sandy beach. A much safer alternative is to fish the protected side around areas such as Bunkers Bay, Rocky Point, Eagle Bay and Meelup Beach.

Bunkers Bay would have to be one of the best on this side of the Cape, however you still have to be very cautious in large swells which whip around Naturaliste. This entire area is popper casting heaven and

inshore temps aren't right, such as in 2005, the bulk of the fish will stay well offshore. If they are to the salmon's liking, beaches, groynes and jetties will be full of them as they were in 2006. But in 2007 the water was somewhere in between and the season was too.

Beach Fishing for Salmon

If you're confined to beach fishing



hours upon hours can be spent fishing the various reef structures that span across this extremely fishy bay.

If you have a boat, trolling shallow running minnow lures in calm water, or deeper divers such as Tilsan Bass and Scorpion 120s in a swell or chop, is a great way to prospect for moving fish.

You can often see them free jumping as they cut through bait fish, or find them under packs of wheeling birds. More often, however, they'll be hard to see and you just need to troll over likely ground.

In Perth, the peak fishing time is from March to May, when large schools of 3-6kg fish take up residence around reefs from Rockingham to Rottneest in particular. Spots to try include Coventry Reef near Rockingham and Fish Hook Bay at Rottneest's west end.

Beach fishing success will depend largely upon whether storms break up the big schools around the islands and send them off towards shore in smaller packs. Water temperature can also play a big part because if the

in Perth, salmon tend to move in from deeper waters to the coast in the morning and late afternoon to feed. Fish from a beach in the same way you would fish for tailor and you may find you pick up both. Look for beach gutters where they will sit and ambush baitfish.

We've found that a Paternoster rig with an impact lead on the bottom and a single gang of two 5/0 hooks is perfect, as salmon like smaller baits. Half a mulie or a fillet of herring is best if you just want to soak a bait and wait. Salmon fishing from the beach is certainly a waiting game because they rarely stay in one place too long, constantly moving up and down the beach.

Although a lot of people bait fish, we have to say that lure fishing can be more productive when the salmon are migrating in large schools. We've tested out several lures over the years and have found for consistency you can't beat using a metal slice.

The company Spanyid has a great

range of metal slices, with the Sniper 60 and Raider 65 accounting for numerous salmon catches every year. The trusty Halco Twisty in 55g or 70g is another one on the priority list. The biggest advantage of metal slices is that they can be cast a mile, even against a stiff seabreeze, which is quite common in WA's south.

Migrating schools can be moving very fast and the dedicated anglers will literally chase them. A very productive method is to land your metal slice just behind the moving school, let it sink and then crank it hard from the bottom, right through the school so it pops up right in front of their noses. This technique can turn a 600km round trip from a 2 fish day into a 15 fish day, but make sure you've put in a good pre-season first or a coronary bypass might be in order by early afternoon.

You also needn't get to your southern beaches at stupid o'clock in the morning. In fact, the schools are migrating constantly so it's a timing thing rather than trying to pick a feed time. If the food presents itself, it'll be eaten!

This means you can set off from Perth in the early morning, reach Dunsborough or Yallingup by 10am and be there for the best visibility as you scan the horizon for salmon. You can fish 10-3pm and still be home to hit the peak hour traffic, so a day trip for South West salmon is very common for Perth anglers.

When the northern migration slows or is over, but smaller schools are still around, bait fishing is now the most productive. Have a lure casting outfit ready, but also anchor your half mulie or, even better, herring fillet out just past the breakers on your surf rod. You can leave it in your rod holder and wait for the schools to wander past and nail the bait. Fresh herring are easily obtainable from most salmon beaches and the fillets are soft, give off lots of smell and make hookups easier.

Poppers can also be used off the beach and, for visual entertainment, you just can't beat them. If you land most lures amongst salmon schools, the probability of getting a hookup is quite high and poppers will certainly get smashed no worries at all. They are, however, more effective in locating fish and, when the going is tough,



casting poppers around structure is a great way of attracting them.

Salmon can't resist the commotion of a popper splashing across the surface imitating a fleeing baitfish. A favourite has to be the Fat-R by Lively Lures and the trusty Roosta

try to get some advice from tackle stores as to where the salmon have been popping up lately but Floreat, Cottesloe, Swanbourne and White Hills are four favourites.

Sometimes, beach fishers are frustrated by huge schools of salmon that will not even look at a bait, fly or lure. In this case I recommend live herring, which they find hard to resist.

Rock Fishing for Salmon

Rock fishing can be an easier proposition. You can pick up salmon all day but it's more than likely

that you have seen others catch fish recently is the key to success.

The final hotspot to consider is the Dawesville Cut in Mandurah. The outer rocks are perfect for spinning as early as late March and spending some time anchoring a durable bait off the end is sure to produce, especially early in the season.

If you have a dinghy, you can really clean up at times, but I've seen salmon being hauled in from the rocks and completely ignore trolled lures. It seems that the best place to cast lures is from the southern wall, almost near the end but just before the last gap that leads to the beach. There is just something about that corner that they love.

When a big salmon feels the hooks it will usually do a bit of head shaking followed by a few short runs, but then it leaps skywards as it tries to rid the hooks. If it fails to do so it will then power off on longer runs that are broken up with more leaps and thrashing gill shakes.

It is important to have a smooth drag on your reel that is well maintained, as a five or six kilo salmon will easily break ten kilo line if the drag is stuck. If you keep the pressure on the fish and tire it out you will usually have won the battle, just be prepared to lose many fish as they jump and throw the hooks.

In late May and June, Margaret River and Augusta can really fire and, even later as the season winds down, heading to Esperance and Albany is your best bet. Their local beaches are usually home to at least a few salmon all year round.

Boat Fishing

As the first schools round Cape Naturaliste, it's a great time to tow your boat south and get into mind blowing salmon action. The schools are easy to spot and simply trolling shallow running minnows will find the schools. They can be ravenous.

In Perth, the best spots to start with are islands off Fremantle but the reefs around Rottnest Island offer the sportfisher real excitement and a sense of challenge that nowhere else in Perth can.

The most obvious place to start is with boat fishing tackle and this is an important choice. Not so much with the rod and reel, anything will do from

2 to 8 kilo, overhead or spinning reel, but pick something you can easily troll with that has a good drag.

Salmon will take plenty of line but there are speedier and tougher critters in the same area that will sort the cheap stuff out pretty quickly. You can fish lighter than from shore and I tend to troll with a baitcaster or spinning reel loaded with 6 kilo Stren IGFA mono that's got a little stretch and I have a 2 kilo casting rod waiting on the side. Although they only have small, raspy teeth, we find a 20kg coated mono leader is required to avoid bustoffs.

Lures for both are important. We're going to be trolling around bommies and the usually hairy "Chicken Run" so you'll need a

the back of the boat, you'll need to change to a deeper diver. The size of the swell will play a big factor here.

Lures for casting at schools can really be anything. You'll be using your casting outfit when you spot a school so a cheap white marabou is just as good as a \$20 minnow. The key here is fun, so choose a lure you like and flick it around. It might also pay to use the cheap ones first, unless you don't mind losing the expensive ones! When they're really fired up, try a popper and you'll end up needing a defibrillator.

If the salmon are boiling it's a no brainer to find them but, when they're not visible and hard to find, you need to get the salmon spy kit out and start searching. The obvious places are

along the western side of the bay and into the open ocean. This is a marine park to protect the reef animals but as long as you're under motor and trolling for migratory fish rather than stopping to tax the reef, it's all legal.

Keep a good eye on your rod tips to make sure those lures are really humming. Vibrations will attract schools, but also have one guy on "bottom watch". This is nothing like the sort of bottom watch you're no doubt expert at watching along Cottesloe Beach, this is polaroiding for schools under the boat.

Now you want to find an area to work. Don't limit yourself to just the reefs close to the island, they go off in all directions with great ledges and bommies found even more than a kilometre from the West End. Try to make a grid pattern and cover as much of the ground as possible and keep an eye out for birds working the surface.

I'd have to say that 85% of my salmon hookups are nowhere near birds but that doesn't mean you should discount them altogether. Some of my best sessions have been under birds when the fish have a bait school cornered and are going to town.

The rod goes down and the fish tears off with your deep diver! The first reaction is to stop the boat, but give it another 6-8 seconds before you stop your forward momentum. The key here is to get another rod hooked up because this really pumps the school full of adrenaline and makes them eager to hit anything in sight.

This is especially good if you have three or more people on the boat because now you can try to keep the school near you and constantly feeding. If there's only two of you, it might be better to fight just one fish until the first comes close, then look for a hookup right near the end. Keeping one fresh hookup in the water at all times can work to hold the fish near your boat as they try to keep up with the action.

When the trolled fish is ready, try casting a reasonably heavy soft plastic, let it sink, then work a retrieve consisting of short lifts and winds. If the salmon are down, you will raise them this way and they can't resist soft tails.

If your first trolling pattern doesn't work, head back into Fish Hook Bay and start the same pattern again. This gets you into a routine that is going to



THIS PICTURE: Luke Ryan landed this superb salmon from the Dawesville Cut using only 2 kilo tackle and a bream rod



THIS PICTURE: Salmon aren't great eating so please release your catch carefully to ensure the survival of this great sportfish

lure that bites in and stays down. It's easy to see why this reef break right near Cape Vlamingh was given this name, as the waves break right along the length of the reef and brave souls play a game of "chicken" with the breaks. Not for the faint of heart.

Trihos are good casting lures for salmon (I'll often have a Min180 or 120 on my 2 kilo casting outfit) but I don't like them for trolling here in the swell because, like most shallow runners, they tend to pop out of waves.

Halco Scorpions and Tilsan Barras are generally what I like to use and anything green is what I'll start with. Gold and mulie patterns are also good performers, but if you see your lure bouncing around at

ledges and bommies but I can't stress enough how important it is to be careful around the west end. It's full of nasty rocks and freak waves so don't get close unless you understand the area well. I've seen otherwise experienced boaties get the red mists and make poor choices out there near Chicken Run when the salmon are biting.

If it's safe, the first place I start trolling is the entrance to Fish Hook Bay. As a kid, I'd spin from the high cliffs and easily pick up 4 or 5 salmon a day as they curved into the bay before heading back out along the reefs, hunting voraciously as they go.

Drive carefully into the bay and set out a couple of deep divers. Now start your troll at about 4-5 knots out

by Halco is another beauty.

Gear wise, a 3-4kg salmon on even 6-8kg line is a handful (especially around reefy areas) as they will run long and often and get more than a metre in the air, gills flared, trying to shake the hooks.

For this reason, a good casting 8-10kg mono is probably best to start with and a spinning reel beats an overhead for casting distance and winding speed unless you're a reel expert.

When picking a beach in Perth,

you'll see them in the morning and late afternoon. They tend to travel along groynes like North and South Mole, Point Peron and Penguin Island in smaller schools, working up and down then heading back to the beaches, before making similar raids at spasmodic intervals.

A small mulie or live herring is, once again, our recommendation for more hookups, but lures work well if the school is there and feeding. As with most fishing, dedication and spending time at one place



bring success if you have the patience.

It's also one of the few places I like some other boats for company. A lot of salmon chasers will watch out for hookups from other boats and head over to join the party. This is mostly a good thing, as the fish will get fired up, so make a ring of boats around the edges of the school and keep working them as a team. Take the time to do this and communicate with other boats and you'll find you can have a school going off for an hour or more.

The same techniques work in other areas and salmon schools will be holed up around Coventry Reef, Garden Island and all the reefs along the way to Rottneest in season. Northern suburbs fishos don't miss

out either, with schools patrolling the inshore waters from Cottesloe through to Hillarys on good years.

The 2007 season wasn't so easy and the fish were scattered far and wide offshore. We found schools as deep as 35 metres out of Hillarys that show up as large balls of red and yellow on your sounder.

To target them, we drive around looking for these schools, always towing a couple of jetheads with pink skirts, and often you'll hit them on the jetheads just after the ball shows up on the sounder. At other times, we had to put the deep diving minnows in and troll in circles to raise a disinterested school. Mostly, they'd come up in less than five minutes.

On the same day we'd often find a school lurking just behind the 3 Mile Reef on the way back in so don't discount any area in salmon season when you're hunting.

On the table, salmon can be eaten and, with care, they can come up

sort of alright but, if you just want to experience the thrill of releasing a big salmon, then quickly remove the hooks, take a photo and slip them back into the water to fight another day. Salmon are pretty tough and will power off after even a long fight, unless they have been gill hooked and blood loss begins to take its toll.

These fish are far too valuable as a recreational species to the community as a whole than the money they earn for a few commercial fishers. Once you have spent several hundred dollars in tackle, fuel, accommodation and everything else that goes with travelling south to catch these fish, you will see where the benefits lie for the economy.

Once you hook one you will gladly part with more money to do it again and again. Add up how many thousands of recreational anglers are all doing the same thing and you will soon realise that each salmon is worth far more as a recreational species than a commercial one.

