

California Collaborative Fishery Research Program provides insight into rockfish stocks in Marine Protected Areas



CALIFORNIA COLLABORATIVE FISHERIES RESEARCH ROJO – Rachel Brooks, Statewide Coordinator of CCFRP, posed with a 57-cm vermilion rockfish with volunteer angler, John Crivello of Monterey.

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HALF MOON BAY – Rockfish regulations have been continually in flux over the past few years with changes in depth restrictions, sublimits of species, and limits of lingcod. In 2023, the rockfish season will be limited to 5.5 months in all areas compared to seasons ranging from 8 to 10 months in 2022. The sublimit for quillback and copper rockfish will remain at one fish while vermilion rockfish will remain at four.

These changes were taken due to information in 2021 indicating severe declines in their populations.

However, there are changes to depth restrictions that will allow anglers to fish deeper water.

The California Collaborative Fisheries Research Program (CCFRP) is one of the drivers of rockfish data, sampling areas within and without the Marine Protected Areas to determine long-term changes in nearshore fish populations.

The CCFRP has been in existence since 2007, utilizing local charter boats and volunteer fishermen to study 4 central California Marine Protected Areas (MPA). The program expanded in 2017 to include 10 additional MPA areas, and standardized scientific methods are used in all regions to provide consistency across data collection.

CCFRP partners with 6 academic institutions (Cal Poly Humboldt, Bodega Marine Laboratories, Moss Landing Marine Laboratories, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, UC Santa Barbara, and Scripps Institution of Oceanography) to conduct fishery-independent hook-and-line, catch and release surveys.

I have had the opportunity to volunteer for two research trips out of Half Moon Bay this season with Captain Michael Cabanas on the New Captain Pete, and on our latest trip on Tuesday, September 13, we were able to fish inside of the closed zone at Ano Nuevo before working the open zone north of the Pigeon Point Lighthouse.

Joining on trip were several members of the science crew including CCFRP Principal Investigator, Scott Hamilton; Statewide Coordinator, Rachel Brooks; and Volunteer Coordinator, Jake Todd.

The protocol is to fish several grids consisting of 500 yards by 500 yards with four anglers in the bow fishing with a 2-ounce jig and shrimp fly teaser, four anglers on the port side of the stern with shrimp flies, and four anglers on the starboard side of the stern with shrimp flies tipped with a strip of squid. The science crew from the Moss Landing Marine Laboratory is on hand to

measure, list, and describe each rockfish along with tagging particular species. To maximize survival, the trips focus on depths less than 120 feet, use barbless hooks, regularly change seawater, release fish within 5 minutes, only tag fish in good conditions, and use descending devices when necessary. There are few fish that do not survive, and care is taken to revive the few fish that float back to the surface.

After a few past trips of working the jig in the bow, I was stationed with shrimp flies tipped with squid. Our first drifts were in the Ano Nuevo closed zones, and I expected to get lit up on every drop at depths ranging from 50 to 80 feet, but the action was slower than anticipated.

Regular volunteer, Ken Yuen of San Jose, continued his amazing jigging technique in the bow by landing the largest ling cod of the day along with several vermilion and cabezon.

We ended up with a total of 332 rockfish comprised of 12 different species, but Friday's trip placed the bar high at 517 fish out of 14 species, tagging 101 fish including a massive 60-cm vermilion at 27.25 inches.

On my trip, John Crivello of Monterey, landed a huge 58-cm vermilion in the open zone above Pigeon Point, and although I have seen my share of big vermilions, Crivello's rojo got my attention. After conducting research trips out of Half Moon Bay, Captain Michael Cabanas will be taking the New Captain Pete north to Bodega Bay this week to run trips out of the Bodega Marine Laboratory.

Being in the presence of the young scientists is inspiring as you witness their dedication first-hand along with learning a tremendous amount about the specifics of the species. Volunteer anglers are an important part of the success of the CCFRP, and to get in on one of these trips for 2023, please send your name, contact information, and preferred sampling region to CCFRP@mlml.calstate.edu. Information on the program is available at <https://mlml.sjsu.edu/ccfrp/>