

Rock Shrimp Fact Sheet

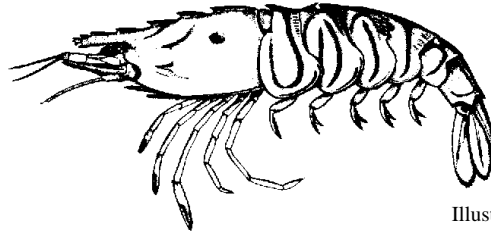


Illustration courtesy of FAO

Common names: Rock shrimp

Latin name: *Sicyonia brevirostris*

Characteristics:

- Live on sandy bottoms at depths of 80 to 200 feet; also utilize hard bottom and coral as habitat.
- Peak spawning occurs between November and January and coincides with the full moon; high reproductive capabilities allow quick rebound from low population levels.
- Life span is 20 to 22 months.
- Feed on small mollusks and crustaceans.

Distribution:

- Gulf of Mexico, Cuba, Bahamas, and the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. up to Virginia.

Local Fisheries:

- U.S. commercial fishery has existed for approximately 30 years, before which rock shrimp was not a targeted fishery. The primary commercial fishery is off Florida's east coast, with some activity off Georgia. Small quantities are occasionally landed in North and South Carolina.
- Rock shrimp are captured by trawlers and the peak season runs from July-October.

Management:

- Rock shrimp are managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC).
- Permits are required for dealers, vessels, and vessel operators. Access to the fishery off the coast of Georgia and Florida is limited to a specific number of vessels.
- Trawl nets must be equipped with Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) and have minimum mesh size to allow escapement of juvenile rock shrimp. Regulations requiring Bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs) which will allow the escapement of other fish is currently under final review. Many rock shrimp fishermen claim to already use BRDs.
- An *Oculina* coral bank off the east coast of Florida was closed to fishing in 1996 after being damaged by shrimp and scallop trawl nets. Scientists believe only 20 acres of fully intact *Oculina* coral thicket habitat are left off the coast of Florida, which may be all that is left in the world. Illegal trawling in the closed area continued to damage the *Oculina* coral until 2003 when the federal government required the use of an approved Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), a satellite tracking device, on rock shrimp vessels at all times to monitor vessels and to detect illegal trawling within the *Oculina* coral protected area.
- In September of 2004 a VMS alerted enforcement authorities to the presence of a rock shrimp trawler, the *Miss Rosa Marie*, in the *Oculina* coral protected area. The vessel and owner were issued a 45-day permit sanction (prevents that vessel or owner from fishing for *any* species requiring a permit) and a \$30,000 fine!