

(*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)

STEELHEAD TROUT

Though they look dissimilar, steelhead and rainbow trout are nearly identical except that the former lives mostly in the ocean while the latter remain in fresh water.



DISTRIBUTION

Though man has transported steelhead to New Zealand, Australia, South America, Africa, Japan, southern Asia, Europe, and even Hawaii, this trout's natural range is the Pacific Coast of North America up through Alaska and across to the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia.

If steelhead were human, I'd say they had multiple personalities. By their nature, they are loners, yet biologists have discovered a vast swath of ocean near the Aleutians where steelhead from both sides of the Pacific, plus the full migratory range of North America, all gather. As anadromous fish (returning to streams to spawn) this steelhead behavior has fisheries experts baffled.

Steelhead populations are further split into two distinct migratory groups: winter steelhead head to their home streams starting in November, while summer steelhead start inland in June. Interestingly, both groups spawn during the winter. Perhaps they split to avoid a traffic jam.

Unlike most anadromous trout and salmon, steelhead don't die after spawning. They can spawn twice or in some cases three times in their lifetimes. Also unlike other char and trout, up to twenty percent of the stock will spawn in streams other than the one in which they started life. Fisheries biologists postulate that this may be nature's way

of protecting genetic viability by preventing inbreeding. Newborn steelhead live in their birth stream for up to four years before they migrate downstream to the sea.

Steelhead and rainbow trout both enjoy greater adaptability to their environment than other salmonids. Though genetically the same, one heads to sea and the other remains in its natal stream. But if access to the sea suddenly disappears, steelhead apparently have no problem giving up their anadromous ways and living full time in fresh water. In fact, it's not uncommon to have both rainbows and steelhead in the same streams. Studies have also shown that rainbows can have both rainbow and steelhead offspring and vice versa. Some scientists logically speculate that food availability determines if fish head to sea as steelheads or remain in the stream as rainbows. Plenty of food tends to keep the fish around.





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(Oncorhynchus mykiss) Weight 10–25 lbs
