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Fish that are Kosher

FOOD FISHES WITH FINS AND SCALES

The anatomy of fishes in its bearing on the requirements of certain religious dietary regulations, with a note on the source of cod and other liver oils

By Isaac Ginsburg, Systematic Zoologist

The Fish and Wildlife Service frequently receives inquiries whether certain fishes are kosher, that is, whether they may be included in the category of food permitted by the laws of the Jewish religion. This leaflet discusses the subject at greater length than is feasible in a letter.

The basic code of Jewish religious law is the Old Testament. The fundamental passage dealing with food products derived from water is found in Leviticus 11:9-12 [text from English Translation of the Bible (p. 130) issued by the Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1922], which reads as follows:

These may ye eat of all that are in the waters: Whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them may ye eat. And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that swarm in the waters, and of all the living creatures that are in the waters, they are a detestable thing unto you, and they shall be a detestable thing unto you; ye shall not eat of their flesh, and their carcasses ye shall have in detestation. Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that is a detestable thing unto you.

Study of this passage may raise questions as to the exact meaning and the adequacy of the translation from the original Hebrew text, especially when considered from the viewpoint of our present-day knowledge of anatomy. The Talmud and the post-Talmudic rabbinical treatises deal with the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament, and controversial Jewish religious questions should be referred to a Rabbi for final decision.

From communications received by the Fish and Wildlife Service, it is evident, however, that any fish that has both fins and scales is unquestionably classified as

kosher. Fortunately most of the food fishes, especially the commercial species, have both fins and scales.

In the everyday language of the layman the word fish, either by itself or in combination, is generally applied to a great variety of very diverse animals that live in the water. For instance, colloquially such creatures as oysters, clams, or mussels are generally designated collectively as shellfish. In the scientific classification of living things they belong to the phylum Mollusca that comprises soft-bodied, invertebrate animals most of which are encased in a hard calcareous shell. Also, such species as lobsters, crabs, shrimps, or crayfish are generally called collectively shellfish because they are enveloped in a tough, chitinous, articulated outer covering. Technically these latter creatures belong to the phylum Arthropoda, which includes invertebrate animals that have legs and other appendages that are jointed and chitinous. Again, such large aquatic animals as whales and porpoises are often popularly thought of as fish. Scientifically, however, these belong to the class Mammalia which includes vertebrate animals with mammary glands, being in these respects like land mammals. This leaflet does not deal with any of the above aquatic animals. It treats only the "true" fishes, which technically belong to the class Pisces. This large group may be described briefly as follows: they have a vertebral column or backbone, live and reproduce in the water, breathe by means of gills throughout life, and have fins except in a few instances. In ordinary language these species are often spoken of as "fin fishes." to distinguish them from such other groups of aquatic animals as described above.

A fish fin is a comparatively thin membranous outgrowth from the body and is supported by slender bony or cartilaginous rods, called fin rays. When the fin supports are stiff and pointed they are called spines. Most fishes have five fins, the names and locations of which are as follows: (1) Pectoral, on the side behind the head; (2) ventral, generally forward of the belly; (3) dorsal, on the back; (4) anal, on the ventral side behind the vent; and (5) caudal, the tail fin. The pectoral and ventral fins are symmetrically paired, like the limbs of a land animal, and the other three are unpaired. In some fishes the dorsal fin is split, forming two or three fins, one behind the other, and in a few the anal is likewise split. In some species one or more of the usual complement of fins may be lacking. The fins differ greatly in size according to species, some being very small, but in nearly all cases they are large enough to be seen with the naked eye. A few species, chiefly of scientific interest and not usually used for food, have minute or rudimentary fins.

The question is rarely raised by the layman as to whether a certain fish has fins, but this is not the case as regards scales, because there is such diversity in their structure, size, number, and developmental history in the multitude of species. Many doubtful cases may be decided by first determining what constitutes a scale. Although it is difficult to condense this information into a few brief paragraphs that will be readily understandable, the more prominent points may be set forth.

In all cases a scale begins to develop in the very young fish as a papilla, or pimple-like outgrowth of the skin, although the final structure will differ according to species. The scales of most species may be divided into the following four primary classes: (1) Ctenoid, (2) cycloid, (3) ganoid, and (4) placoid. The majority of fishes have either ctenoid or cycloid scales.

Ctenoid scales have minute spinelike projections at their exposed edges. Because of these projections the scales feel rough when the fish is stroked with the finger tips from the tail forward. By this test, with some practice, one is usually able to decide whether the scales are ctenoid. A black bass, for example, has ctenoid scales.

Cycloid scales lack the minute spines and have edges that are generally rounded. The carp and herring are examples of species bearing cycloid scales.

Comparatively few species now living possess ganoid scales, but fossil remains of fishes uncovered in layers of rock show that ganoid scales were common among species that lived in past ages. Those scales are thicker and heavier than either the cycloid or the ctenoid. The sturgeon is an example of a present-day species having ganoid scales.

Placoid scales are characteristic of sharks. They are very firmly attached to the skin and have tiny spinous projections that give sharkskin its feeling of roughness.

Scales of most fishes can be assigned to one of these four major classes, but in some species their structure is such that they cannot be placed readily in any one class. For example, some species have scales that are in the form of bony tubercles or platelets, in a variety of shapes, depending on the particular species. In some species the scales are intermediate in structure between the major classes. Also, some fishes have different kinds of scales on different parts of the body or head.

Scales vary widely in size between different species. In some, including the fresh-water eel, the butterfish, and the mackerel, they are either minute or notably small, while in the carp they are large. When all species are considered, there are all gradations of scale size, and fishes cannot be divided consistently into groups on this basis. Also, no matter where the line is drawn there will always be intermediates that may be placed in either one of two adjacent groups.

Fishes also differ widely in the number of scales and the extent to which these cover the body. Some species have but two scales, others have four, still others have a small patch of scales, covering but a small part of the body, and so on through gradations to those species in which virtually the entire surface of the body and fins is covered.

Another matter to be considered is that of individual variability between members of the same species. The old saying that "no two blades of grass are exactly alike" applies also to fishes. In some species, especially those having but few scales, their number and extent are virtually constant. In most species there is only a moderate degree of variability. In others, however, variations in individuals are pronounced, and the difference between extremes of the same species is striking.

A notable example is the carp, in a majority of which the scales cover virtually the entire body, but in many cases more or less incompletely so, and there are all degrees of extent of scale covering between the extremes. It is interesting to note that among carp, which appear to be universally considered as kosher fish, some individuals have no scales.

Of the fishes most commonly sold in the market, those that have both fins and scales are listed on pages 4 to 6. In using this list it should be borne in mind that the common names of fishes vary in different sections. The scientific names in this list are those most generally used. It is impracticable to give a complete tabulation of common names to show differences in local usage. In scientific classification of fishes as well as other living things, every known species has a name that consists of two words. As the scientific names are relatively stable and do not differ with local usage, they are included in the list for the sake of clarity and precision. Some of these fishes may appear to lack either fins or scales, but upon close inspection these structures will be discovered. Following are the more striking examples of species about which inquiries are most often received or which depart widely in the structure of their scales from the great majority of species of fishes.

The fresh-water eel is a fish frequently thought to lack both fins and scales. The fins are low or short but may easily be detected. The scales are minute and not readily apparent on a fish just out of water, though readily visible when it is allowed to dry.

The presence of scales on the mackerel and butterfish is sometimes questioned. These fishes have very small scales that often tend to fall off after the fish is captured, but some usually adhere and may be seen upon inspection.

The sturgeon is a controversial species, although it has scales and fins. The scales are of two kinds: (1) Large ganoid scales in five rather widely separate longitudinal rows and (2) small tuberculoid scales in between.

Swordfish during the early juvenile stage of life have scales that are markedly specialized and rather unique. They are in the form of bony tubercles, or expanded compressed platelike bodies. These scales are rough, having spinous projections at the surface, and they do not overlap one

another as scales in most other fishes do. With growth the scales disappear and the larger fish, including those sold in the market, have no scales.

The paddlefish, also known as spoonbill catfish, a fresh-water species found in the Mississippi drainage and adjacent waters, the roe of which is often processed into caviar, has a smooth scaleless body, but the tail end of the fish has a lengthwise patch of narrow, elongate, spindle-shaped, flat scales that differ strikingly from the ordinary fish scales with which the layman is familiar. They are markedly unlike the scales that are classifiable in the four major groups outlined above.

Source of Cod and Other Liver Oils

Inquiries also are received as to the availability of cod-liver oil for consumption by Jews. The question may be narrowed to a consideration of the source of cod-liver oil; that is, whether it comes from a fish having fins and scales. For answer we must turn to the United States Pharmacopeia, in this country the official book on drug standards which are enforced by Federal laws. The Pharmacopeia (Eleventh revision, p. 261-262) defines cod-liver oil as "The . . . fixed oil obtained from fresh livers of *Gadus morrhua* . . . and other species of the family Gadidae." *Gadus morrhua* is the well-known codfish, and this, together with other species of the family Gadidae, has fins and scales. Consequently, cod-liver oil that is prepared according to Pharmacopeia standards is derived from fishes having both fins and scales and presumably is kosher. The letters "U.S.P." on the label of a container of cod-liver oil means that the oil is guaranteed to have been prepared according to the standards of the United States Pharmacopeia, and any adulteration of such oil subjects both the producer and retailer to prosecution under the Federal pure food and drug laws.

In the last few years the use of various vitamin products has become widespread, and the liver oils of species other than those belonging to the family Gadidae have entered into the preparation of such products. Common among these are halibut-liver oil, which is derived from a species having both fins and small cycloid scales, and shark-liver oil, derived from the livers of sharks of various species. Sharks have fins and scales, but the scales are placoid, and their structure differs from that of most other fishes.

Partial List of Common Food Fishes That Have Both Fins and Scales

(The notation "sp" signifies that more than one species in the same genus or family bear the same common name.)

- Albacore:
Thunnus alalunga
- Alewife; river herring:
Alosa sp.
- Amberjack;
Seriola sp.
- Anchovy:
Engraulis mordax
Anchoa sp.
- Angelfish:
Pomacanthus sp.
Holacanthus sp.
- Barracuda:
Sphyaena sp.
- Bass, black:
Micropterus sp.
- Bass, rock:
Ambloplites rupestris (fresh water)
- Bass, sand:
Paralabrax sp.
- Bass, sea:
Stereolepis gigas
Centropristes sp.
- Bass, sea, white:
Cynoscion nobilis
- Bass, striped:
Roccus saxatilis
- Bass, white:
Roccus chrysops
- Bass, yellow:
Roccus interrupta
- Bluefish:
Pomatomus saltatrix
- Blue runner; hardtail:
Caranx crysos
- Bonito:
Sarda sp.
- Bowfin:
Amia calva
- Buffalofish:
Ictiobus sp.
- Burbot:
Lota lota
- Butterfish:
Poronotus triacanthus
- Cobio:
Rachycentron canadum
- Carp:
Cyprinus carpio
- Chub:
Leucichthys sp. (except
L. artedi)
- Cisco:
Leucichthys artedi (Lake Erie)
- Cod:
Gadus sp.
- Crappie:
Pomoxis sp.
- Crevalle:
Caranx hippos
- Croaker; hardhead:
Micropogon undulatus
- Cunner:
Tautoglabrus adspersus
- Cusk:
Brosme brosme
- Dolphinfish:
Coryphaena hippurus
- Drum, black:
Pogonias cromis
- Drum, red:
Sciaenops ocellata
- Eel, fresh-water:
Anguilla rostrata

- Eulachon:
Thaleichthys pacificus
- Flounder:
Pleuronectidae sp.
- Flyingfish:
Cypselurus sp.
- Goldfish:
Carassius auratus
- Grouper:
Epinephelus sp.
Mycteroperca sp.
- Grunt:
Haemulon sp.
- Haddock:
Melanogrammus aeglefinus
- Hake:
Urophycis sp. (Atlantic coast)
Merluccius sp.
- Halfmoon:
Medialuna californiensis
- Halibut:
Hippoglossus sp.
- Halibut, California:
Paralichthys californicus
- Hardhead:
Orthodon microlepidotus
- Harvestfish:
Peprilus alepidotus
- Herring; sardine (name used for canned small fish of Atlantic species):
Clupea sp.
- Herring, lake:
Leucichthys artedi (Great Lakes except Lake Erie)
- Hogchoker:
Achirus sp.
- Hogfish (Florida):
Lachnolaimus maximus
- Jewfish:
Epinephalus itajara
- Kingfish (Florida)
Scomberomorus cavalla
- Kingfish (California):
Genyonemus lineatus
- Ladyfish:
Albula vulpes
- Lingcod:
Ophiodon elongatus
- Mackerel:
Scomber sp.
- Mackerel, frigate:
Auxis thazard
- Mackerel, jack:
Trachurus symmetricus
- Mackerel, king:
Scomberomorus cavalla
- Mackerel, Spanish:
Scomberomorus maculatus
- Mackerel, chub:
Scomber colias
- Menhaden:
Brevoortia sp.
- Mojarro:
Eucinostomas sp.
- Mooneye:
Hiodon sp.
- Moonfish:
Vomer setapinnis
Selene vomer
- Mullet:
Mugil sp.
- Muttonfish:
Lutianus analis
- Opaleye:
Girella nigricans
- Paddlefish:
Polyodon spathula
- Parrotfish:
Scaridae sp.
- Perch, silver:
Bairdiella chrysura
- Perch, white:
Roccus americana
Embiotocidae sp. (Pacific coast)

Perch, yellow:

Perca flavescens

Permit (name applied to large specimens of pompano):

Trachinotus sp.

Pickereel:

Esox sp.

Pigfish:

Orthopristis chrysopterus

Pike; jack:

Esox lucius

Pikeperch, blue; blue pike:

Stizostedion glaucum

Pikeperch, yellow; yellow pike:

Stizostedion glaucum

Pilchard (see also sardine):

Sardinops caerulea

Pinfish:

Lagodon rhomboides

Pollock:

Pollachius virens

Pompano (see also permit):

Trachinotus sp. (Atlantic coast)

Palometa simillima (Pacific coast)

Porgy:

Calamus sp.

Porkfish:

Anisotremus virginicus

Quillback:

Carpionodes sp.

Rockfish:

Sebastes sp. (Pacific coast)

Roccus saxatilis (Atlantic coast)

Rosefish; redfish; ocean perch:

Sebastes marinus

Sablefish:

Anoplopoma fimbria

Salmon, Atlantic:

Salmo salar

Salmon, Pacific:

King, chinook, or spring:

Oncorhynchus tshawytscha

Red, sockeye, or blueback:

Oncorhynchus nerka

Silver or coho:

Oncorhynchus kisutch

Pink or humpback:

Oncorhynchus gorbuscha

Chum, keta, or dog:

Oncorhynchus keta

Sardine:

Sardinops caerulea (Pacific coast)

Clupea harengus (Atlantic coast; small canned fish)

Sauger; pike:

Stizostedion canadense

Scup:

Stenotomus chrysops

Sea gar:

Tylosurus sp.

Sea robin:

Prionotus sp.

Shad:

Alosa sapidissima

Shad, gizzard:

Dorosoma cepedianum

Shad, hickory:

Alosa mediocris

Sheepshead, salt-water:

Archosargus sp.

Sheepshead, fresh-water:

Aplodinotus grunniens

Sheepshead (Pacific coast):

Pimelometopon pulcher

Skipjack; striped tuna:

Katsuwonus pelamis

Skipper:

Scomberesox saurus

Smelt:

Osmeridae sp.

Snapper, mangrove:

Lutianus griseus

- Snapper, red:
Lutianus blackfordi
- Snook:
Centropomus undecimalis
- Sole (Pacific coast):
Psettichthys melanostictus
- Spadefish:
Chaetodipterus faber
- Splittail:
Pogonichthys macrolepidotus
- Spot:
Leiostomus xanthurus
- Squawfish:
Ptychocheilus oregonensis
- Squeteague, gray; sea trout; weakfish:
Cynoscion regalis
- Squeteague, sand; sand trout:
Cynoscion arenarius
- Squeteague, spotted; spotted sea trout:
Cynoscion nebulosus
- Sturgeon:
Acipenser sp.
- Sturgeon, shovel-nosed:
Scaphirhynchus platyrhynchus
- Sucker:
Catostomidae sp.
- Sunfish:
Lepomis sp.
Centrarchidae sp.
- Swordfish:
Xiphias gladius
- Tarpon:
Tarpon atlanticus
- Tautog:
Tautoga onitis
- Ten-pounder:
Elops saurus
- Tilefish:
Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps
- Tomcod:
Microgadus sp.
- Tripletail:
Lobotes surinamensis
- Trout, Dolly Varden:
Salvelinus malma
- Trout, lake:
Cristivomer namaycush
- Trout, steelhead:
Salmo gairdneri
- Trout (sea also squeteague)
- Tuna, blackfin:
Thunnus atlanticus
- Tuna, bluefin:
Thunnus thynnus
- Tuna, little:
Euthynnus alletteratus
- Tuna, longfin (see also albacore)
- Tuna, striped (see also skipjack)
- Tuna, yellowfin:
Thunnus albacares
- Turbot:
Reinhardtius hippoglossoides
Balistes carolinensis
- Whitefish:
Coregonus clupeaformis (Great Lakes)
Caulolatilus princeps (Pacific coast)
- Whitefish, Menominee:
Prosopium quadrilaterale
- Whiting:
Merluccius sp.
- Whiting, king:
Menticirrhus sp.
- Wolffish:
Anarhichas sp.
- Yellowtail:
Ocyurus chrysurus (Atlantic coast)
Seriola dorsalis (Pacific coast)