



# FACT SHEET FOR BLACK MUSSELCRACKER

**Scientific Name:** *Cymatoceps nasutus*

**Common Names:** Black Musselcracker, Poenskop

**Family:** Sparidae

**Size:** Can grow to 1.2 m and weigh 40 kg

## Identification Features:

This species is one of the larger members of the Sparidae family. It has a deep, robust body, but its overall shape varies with age as well as size. You will find that older specimens develop extended fleshy snouts. They are heavier and more powerful than the White Musselcracker. The colour of the fish's body also varies with age and size; they are a sooty grey to black in colour with white chins & throats. The juveniles are lighter overall and have two or more darker vertical bars on their sides. The juveniles however are noticeably different; they are greenish-brown overall, with numerous white blotches.

## Distribution

This is an endemic species, from the Cape to Mozambique. Although they are widely distributed, the majority of the Black Musselcracker population can be found between Mossel Bay & the Eastern Cape. Black Musselcrackers, especially the larger ones, are more solitary & extremely territorial with a limited home range. Along the east coast, abundance increases during winter.

## Habitat:

This large solitary fish is found both on shallow and deep rocky reefs. The adults live on deep high-profile reefs between 2 and 100 m deep. The juveniles are found in shallow subtidal reefs. The distribution of larvae and eggs are unknown.

## Diet:

This fish has powerful jaws lined with rows of crushing molar-like large teeth. This allows them to feed on just about anything; they feed on crabs, crayfish, sea urchins, and other large, hard shelled animals. Prey is first grabbed and held firmly by the conical teeth, before being crushed by the powerful jaws and molars.

## Reproduction:

The absence of reproductively active adults in the south Western Cape and the south Eastern Cape suggests that there is an easterly spawning migration to the north Eastern

Cape and KZN. Increases in the abundance of this fish on the East Coast during winter suggest that this seasonal movement coincides with the breeding season. Very little is known about the reproductive cycle of this fish.

50% maturity: **10 years**  
Maximum age: **45.5 years**  
Reproductive style: **Protogynous hermaphrodite (sex change from female to male)**  
Age at sex change: **about 18 years**  
Male to female ratio: **1:6 (as at June 2000)**

### **Capture:**

The Black Musselcracker is often hooked by shore anglers fishing from rocky areas, and ski boat anglers operating over deeper reefs. Its seldom landed, for its strength and dogged fighting ability make it a formidable adversary. Its sluggish habits make it an easy target for spear fishermen. **ANGLERS SHOULD STRONGLY RECONSIDER BEFORE REMOVING THIS MAGNIFICENT FISH FROM THE SEA.**

SA Angling Record: **37.8 kg**  
SA Spear fishing Record: **36.0 kg**

### **Regulations:**

Category: **Critical List**  
Bag limit: **1 per person per day**  
**(This includes both recreational and commercial fishermen)**  
Minimum size: **50 cm**  
Closed Season: **None**  
Other Regulations: **None**  
SASSI: **Red List**

### **Management Considerations:**

The management considerations of this species are its slow growth rate, late sexual maturation and sex change. Also the rebuilding of stock and the use of MPA's are essential.

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