



FACT SHEET

BLACK MARLIN

Istiompax indica

Family: Istiophoridae

Other common names: Swart marlyn

Description

A powerful, elongate fish with a sloping forehead and a long, sharp spear-like snout. In live specimens the overall body colour is metallic blue-black with a white belly but the fish changes to an overall deep black once landed. The fins have no spines and the rigid pectoral fins cannot be folded against the flanks.

Distribution

Distributed throughout tropical and sub-tropical waters of the Indo-Pacific in temperatures ranging from 15-30°C. Rarely reported from the Atlantic. During summer reaches temperate waters. In southern African waters extends down the eastern seaboard of South Africa with occasional strays entering the Atlantic Ocean around the Cape.

Habitat

Oceanic, highly migratory and epipelagic, usually above the thermocline. Often found close to land masses, islands and coral reefs at depths ranging from the surface to 200m.

Feeding

A powerful predator of pelagic shoaling fishes, including tuna and squid.

Movement

Highly mobile species which appears to move into higher latitudes during summer and returns to warmer, tropical waters during winter, but movement patterns are not predictable. Black marlin is the most common marlin species in South African waters and is most abundant off the KwaZulu-Natal coast during summer. This species may range as far south as Cape Point.

Reproduction	Females grow larger than males and reach maturity at a weight of about 200 kg, while males mature at around 50-80 kg. No spawning has been recorded in South African waters and it is likely that this occurs in more tropical regions. They are highly fecund with a mature female producing in the order of 40 million eggs.
Age and growth	They reach a maximum length of 448 cm total length and a weight of 707 kg. They can reach an age of 20 years.
Current status	Current status: The status of black marlin in the Indian Ocean has not been assessed but catch rates in most areas have declined. It is estimated that the overall catch of black marlin in the Indian Ocean exceeds 4000 t per year. Evaluated as Data Deficient on the IUCN Red List (2009). South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI) List: Not assessed.
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Capture	Taken by pelagic longlines and drift gillnets throughout the Indian Ocean region, especially by China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Sri-Lanka and Indonesia, but the catch is much less than for other billfish species. Important recreational target species, caught by ski-boat anglers primarily off the east coast of Africa including KwaZulu-Natal, but most are released. Perhaps one of the most prized of all gamefish species which can be caught on lures and trolled fish baits.
Current recreational fishing regulations	Daily bag limit: 5 per person per day Minimum size limit: None Closed Season: None Other regulations: No sale recreational species. However, allowed as a bycatch on pelagic longline vessels operating in South African waters, so this is an anomaly in the legislation. Marine protected areas (MPAs): The highly migratory nature of black marlin means that they receive limited protection in MPAs.
Reference	Information from the ORI Fish App. www.saambr.org.za



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