

GOLIATH GROUPE

GUASA or JEW FISH

Epinephelus itajara

Largest grouper in the Western Atlantic:
 Grows to 8 feet (~2.5 m) and weighs up to 990 lbs (450 kg).
 Lives at least 37 years perhaps to over 50 yrs.
 Broad distribution through West Africa, Western Atlantic from Florida to Brazil, the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico and Eastern Pacific.



THREATS

Habitat loss, spawning aggregation fishing and targeting of juveniles are the three primary threats to Goliath Grouper globally. The combined effects create the 'perfect storm' for population extinction. To better understand the Goliath Grouper, research on their biology, behaviour, critical habitats and the fishery is underway in Belize, Florida and Brazil.

HABITAT

Immature Goliath Grouper prefer to live in red mangrove areas and brackish estuaries while larger mature fish choose to inhabit deeper offshore sites with rocky patches, wrecks, pipes, caves or reefs.

REPRODUCTION

Young adults frequent both inshore and offshore locations, eventually moving to fore-reef sites or wrecks in July to September to spawn in aggregations that can number several tens or hundreds of fish.

GROWTH

Male and female Goliath Grouper reach maturity at about 4 to 6 years and around 45" total length (110-115 cm) in males whereas females take about 6 to 7 years, or a total length of about 50" (120-135 cm), to reach maturity.

Eggs hatch after about 24 hrs and larvae settle in mangroves after about 6 weeks.

FEEDING

Goliath Grouper are solitary ambush predators whose food items include: lobster, finfish such as catfish and mullet, crabs, even stingrays and turtles. Aside from man, their key predators are other finfish and sharks.

CONSERVATION STATUS

The World Conservation Union lists the Goliath Grouper as globally critically endangered with the threat of extinction. This species is listed as endangered in the US, Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands. A fishing moratorium exists for Goliath Grouper along most of Brazil's coast. Their status in other countries is unknown but reports from fishermen indicate that populations have declined.

IN BELIZE

Goliath Grouper are threatened by overfishing with longlines, set lines, and spears. Loss of critical mangrove nursery habitat due to development is further affecting the survival of Goliath Grouper populations.

