

# FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

## The Warsaw Grouper

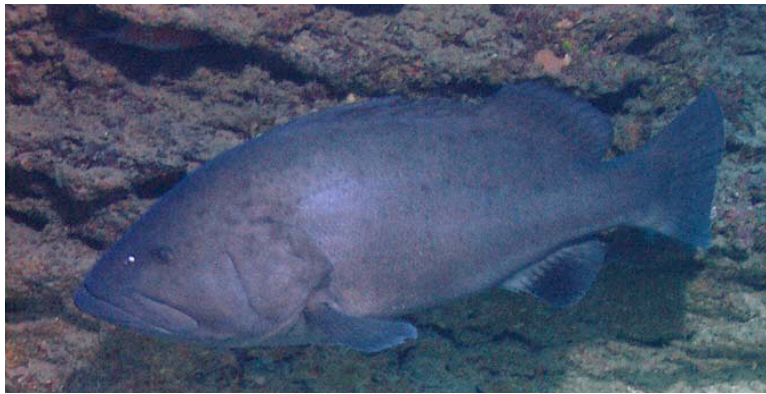


Photo: © IFE/URI/IAO

### A BIG FISH IN TROUBLED WATERS

The Warsaw Grouper (*Epinephelus nigritus*) is a large fish that occurs in deep waters in the Western Atlantic from Massachusetts to the Gulf of Mexico, Cuba, and Trinidad, down the coast of South America. It is ranked by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources as critically endangered and by the American Fisheries Society as endangered. While the U.S. government considers it a species of concern, this grouper has no protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. The Warsaw Grouper can reach 7.7 feet in length and weighs up to 440 pounds.

### PROTECTING THE DEPTHS

Adult Warsaw Groupers inhabit rough, rocky bottoms in waters 180-1700 feet deep. But its deep-water dwelling doesn't protect it from humans: it is threatened by both targeted fishing and as by-catch. It suffers from "the bends," hemorrhaging, and death when hooked and pulled up from its deep waters. Because it is large-bodied and aggregates in specific areas for spawning, this grouper is easy to catch in large numbers. Its long life spans and slow maturity make it more susceptible to over-fishing. About 99 percent of Warsaw Groupers are captured in the Gulf of Mexico. Federal U.S. protection would help address the enormous threat from fishers – there are over 1 million recreational saltwater fishing licenses in Florida alone.

### KNOW YOUR GROUPEE

- Long-lived: the Warsaw Grouper reaches sexual maturity at 9 years old and can live up to 41 years.
- Sex Change: all Warsaw Groupers begin life as females, then some switch to males when they reach sexual maturity.
- Spiny: this species is the only grouper with 10 dorsal spines.
- Big Mouth: their large mouth allows them to ingest whole prey, such as crab, shrimp, and fish. They ambush their prey or capture it after a short chase.

### TOO MANY PEOPLE, NOT ENOUGH GROUPERS

Already high and increasing human population densities are leading to the decline and, in some areas, absence of large predatory fish such as groupers.

