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The Mighty King Salmon: A Journey Through the Waters

King Salmon, also known as Chinook Salmon, are some of the most majestic fish in the world. They can grow larger than a middle schooler and have an epic life journey filled with adventure and danger. Let's dive into the world of King Salmon and learn what makes them so cool and important to our ecosystem!

Life Stages of King Salmon

King Salmon have an incredible life cycle that takes them from freshwater streams to the deep ocean and back. Here's a breakdown of their amazing journey:

1. **Egg Stage:** King Salmon start their lives as tiny, round eggs laid in gravel nests (called "redds") in freshwater streams. Female salmon lay thousands of eggs to ensure some survive.
2. **Alevin Stage:** Once they hatch, they are called alevins. These tiny fish have a yolk sac attached to their bellies that provides them with nutrients while they hide in the gravel.
3. **Fry Stage:** After using up their yolk sac, the salmon become fry. At this stage, they swim freely in streams and start hunting for food.
4. **Parr Stage:** As they grow, they develop dark marks on their sides called "parr marks." These help them blend in with the rocks and vegetation to avoid predators.
5. **Smolt Stage:** Once big enough, they transform into smolts and head toward the ocean, changing their appearance to silver to blend in with the ocean's waters.
6. **Adult Stage:** In the ocean, King Salmon grow rapidly, feeding on fish, squid, and crustaceans. After a few years, they return to the freshwater streams where they were born to spawn.
7. **Spawning Stage:** After they make their way back upstream, adult salmon lay their eggs, and the cycle begins again. After spawning, most King Salmon die, completing their life journey.



Caring for Their Young

Salmon moms are pretty fierce! They carefully pick a spot with clean gravel to lay their eggs and even guard the eggs for a short time before they pass away. Though they don't stick around long after laying the eggs, the gravel nests provide enough protection to keep the eggs safe until they hatch.

Where Do King Salmon Live?

King Salmon live in both freshwater and saltwater! They are born in the cold, clear rivers of North America, especially in places like Alaska, British Columbia, and the Pacific Northwest. Once they reach the smolt stage, they migrate to the ocean, where they spend most of their lives before returning to freshwater to spawn.

What Do King Salmon Eat?

King Salmon are fierce hunters! In freshwater, they eat insects, small crustaceans, and plankton. Once they reach the ocean, their diet changes to larger prey like smaller fish, squid, and shrimp. They catch their food by swimming fast and using their sharp teeth to grab hold of it!


Staying Hidden and Defending Themselves

Salmon have some clever ways to stay safe from predators. When they are young, their "parr marks" help them blend into the rocks and plants around them. As smolts, their shiny, silvery color helps them camouflage with the ocean's reflective surface. King Salmon don't have many physical defenses like sharp spines or venom, but their size and speed make them tough to catch!

10 Fun Facts About King Salmon

1. King Salmon can weigh over 100 pounds!
2. They are the largest species of Pacific salmon.
3. Some King Salmon can swim more than 1,000 miles upstream to return to their birthplace.
4. They have a keen sense of smell and can "sniff" their way back to the river where they were born.
5. King Salmon can live up to 7 years!
6. Their scientific name is *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha* (say that five times fast!).
7. They change color when they move from the ocean to freshwater; ocean salmon are silver, but spawning salmon can turn red, green, or purple!
8. King Salmon have been a vital food source for many indigenous people for thousands of years.
9. Some King Salmon populations are threatened due to habitat destruction and overfishing.
10. They can jump up to 12 feet when trying to make it past waterfalls!

King Salmon Video (National Geographic Wild)

 The Salmon's Life Mission | Destination WILD

King Salmon Video (Ocean Wise)

Salmon's life cycle and their incredible impact on our ecosystem

Vocabulary

1. **Smolt** (*smohlt*) – A young salmon that is preparing to migrate to the ocean.
2. **Parr Marks** (*pahr mahrs*) – Dark, vertical lines on young salmon that help them blend into their environment.
3. **Spawn** (*spawn*) – To lay eggs in freshwater.
4. **Redd** (*red*) – A gravel nest where salmon lay their eggs.
5. **Crustaceans** (*kruh-stay-shuhnz*) – Small ocean animals with hard shells, like crabs or shrimp.

Multiple Choice Questions

What stage is a salmon in right after hatching?

- a) Fry
- b) Egg
- c) Alevin
- d) Smolt

Where do King Salmon lay their eggs?

- a) Ocean floor
- b) In sandy beaches
- c) In gravel nests called "redds"
- d) In underwater caves

What do adult King Salmon eat in the ocean?

- a) Plants
- b) Fish, squid, and shrimp
- c) Insects
- d) Seaweed

How do King Salmon protect themselves from predators when young?

- a) They use their parr marks to blend in
- b) They hide in the ocean's coral reefs
- c) They swim very slowly
- d) They use sharp spines

What is the largest known weight of a King Salmon?

- a) 50 pounds
- b) 75 pounds
- c) 100 pounds
- d) 120 pounds

How far can some King Salmon swim to reach their birthplace?

- a) 500 miles
- b) 100 miles
- c) 1,000 miles
- d) 200 miles

What happens to most King Salmon after they spawn?

- a) They return to the ocean
- b) They die
- c) They lay more eggs
- d) They continue living in the river

What color are King Salmon when they live in the ocean?

- a) Blue

- b) Silver
- c) Green
- d) Brown

What is a King Salmon's main defense mechanism?

- a) Their speed and size
- b) Poisonous scales
- c) Sharp teeth
- d) Venom

How long can King Salmon live?

- a) 3 years
- b) 5 years
- c) 7 years
- d) 10 years

Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

- c) Alevin
- c) In gravel nests called "redds"
- b) Fish, squid, and shrimp
- a) They use their parr marks to blend in
- d) 120 pounds
- c) 1,000 miles
- b) They die
- b) Silver
- a) Their speed and size
- c) 7 years