

THE LIFE OF A SALMON

MAKING A NEST

Salmon make nests to protect their eggs. But instead of using sticks, they use gravel. Females lay nearly 7,000 eggs that are only the size of a pea! While she is making her nest the male salmon chases away other males.



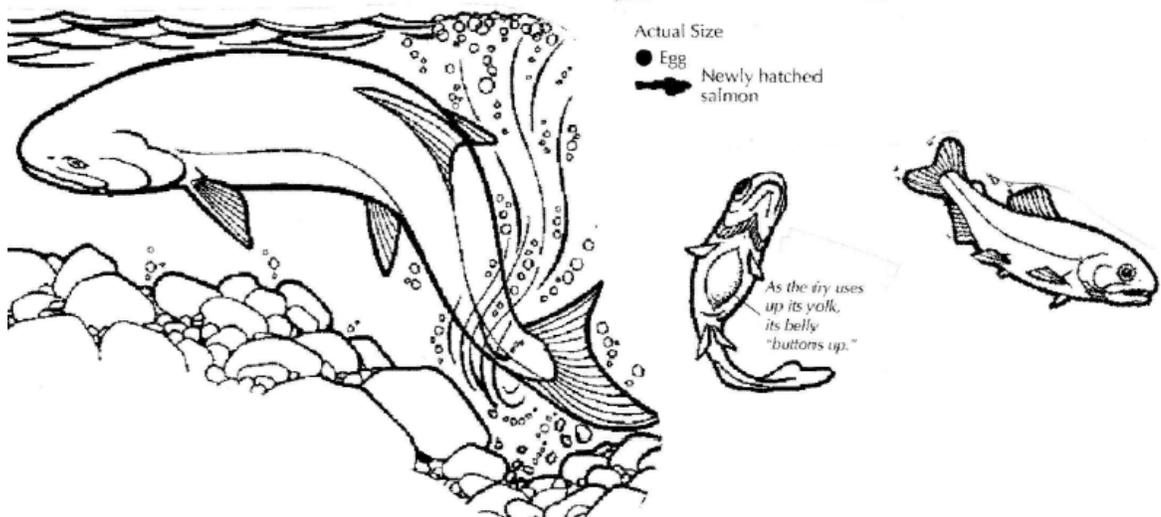
SPAWNING

When the female is ready to lay her eggs the male swims back and forth across her back, then moves along side her and fertilizes her eggs. Most adult salmon die when they are done with fertilization.

HATCHING & SALMON GROWTH

Salmon are the best known *anadromous* species. Meaning they migrate from the sea to fresh water to spawn. They hatch their eggs in the winter. When the eggs are ready to hatch they are called *alevin* and will live off of their own yolk sacs until they are ready to emerge.

Once they emerge from the egg they are called *fry* and begin to live in the streams. The new salmon will start going down stream to head to the ocean. They will live in an *estuary*. An estuary is a place where the river meets the stream. They will live there for a while where their bodies go through *smoltification* so they can adjust to the differences between the ocean vs. stream water (such as vegetation, temperature, and salt vs. fresh water).



HOW MUCH TIME?

Some salmon will swim nearly 2,000 miles out to sea and others will stay closer to shore. The lifespan of a salmon can vary anywhere from 3-8 years. It all depends on their *journey to sea*, health, and other circumstances.

TYPES OF SALMON¹

Chinook: “King” Salmon because of their size. They can be up to 125 lbs. Their lifespan is up to 7 years.



Photo taken by US Fish & Wildlife²

Coho: “Silver” Salmon. Spend about 2 years in freshwater before going out to sea, commercial fisherman used to seek these out first but now they are harder to find.

Chum: “Dog” salmon ~ they have teeth that look like dogs!



Photo taken by: Ovinphagy³

¹ *Meet the Species:* Salmon Nation. Retrieved January 15, 2014 from http://www.salmonnation.com/fish/meet_species.html.

² *Chinook Salmon Fish.* US Fish & Wildlife. Date take not given. File is a public domain: <http://www.public-domain-image.com/public-domain-images-pictures-free-stock-photos/nature-landscapes-public-domain-images-pictures/bay-public-domain-images-pictures/chinook-salmon-fish.jpg>

Pink: “Humpies”. Smallest species of salmon and also used the most for canning.

Sockeye: “Reds.” The name comes from the First Nation (Native American *sukkai* which means “fish” see reference above).



Photo Terms ⁴

Steelhead Salmon: Many will live in freshwater without ever going to sea ~ then they are called **Rainbow Trout**.



Photo taken by Fungus Guy⁵

³ Chum Salmon & Pink Salmon. Taken Sept 20th 2002. By Oviphagy. File is a public domain.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chum_Salmon_and_Pink_salmon_2.jpg

⁴ Sockeye Salmon at Oregon Zoo. Taken October 6th 2006. Permission granted under GNU at
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNU_Free_Documentation_License on January 29, 2014.

The Native Americans & The Salmon

Salmon were very important to the *Native American* people, especially those living on near the Pacific Ocean and in the northwest states of Oregon & Washington. They were a great source of food for the people. They didn't just eat the salmon, but made use of their bones for other things too. The Native Americans were always thankful for salmon and thought of the salmon as a gift and would always have *ceremonies* when there were many fish every year⁶ You will often see the salmon on the *totem pole* of many coastal Native American's and its role and importance in the life cycle. The Native Americans would hold their ceremonies in places called longhouses such as the one depicted below which is called Ivars Salmon House based out of Seattle, Washington which would depict the Pacific Northwest Tribes.



Photo taken by Joe Mabel ⁷

⁵ Rainbow Trout. Taken June 18th 2006. By Fungus Guy. Retrieved from public domain [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rainbow_trout_\(St_Mary%27s_Rapids\)_1.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rainbow_trout_(St_Mary%27s_Rapids)_1.JPG) on January 29, 2014

⁶ *Salmon The Living Gift*. University Libraries: Washington State University. Retrieved January 15, 2014 from University Libraries WSU <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/miller2.html>.

⁷ *Ivars Salmon House, Seattle Washington*. Photo taken by Joe Mable October 8th 2006. GFDL granted by photographer to copy image from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ivars_Salmon_House_01A.jpg.

Salmon Boy

Long ago among the Haida people, there was a boy who showed no respect for the salmon. Though the salmon meant life for the people, he was not respectful of the one his people called Swimmer. His parents told him to show gratitude and behave properly, but he did not listen. When fishing, he would step on the bodies of the salmon that were caught and after eating he carelessly threw the bones of the fish into the bushes. Others warned him that the spirits of the salmon were not pleased by such bad behavior, but he did not listen. One day, his mother served him a meal of salmon. He looked at it with disgust. "This is moldy" he said, though the meat was good. He threw it upon the ground. Then, he went down to the river to swim with the other children. However, as he was swimming, a current caught him and pulled him away from the others. It swept him into the deepest water and he could not swim strongly enough to escape from it. He sank into the river and drowned.

There, deep in the river, the Salmon People took him with them. They were returning back to the ocean without using their bodies. They had left their bodies behind for the humans and the animal people to use as food. The boy went with them, for now, he belonged to the salmon.

When they reached their home, in the ocean, they looked just like human beings. Their village there in the ocean looked much like his own home and he could hear the sound of children playing in the stream which flowed behind the village. Now the Salmon People began to teach the boy. He was hungry and they told him to go to the stream and catch one their children, who were salmon swimming in the stream. However, he was told, he must be respectful and after eating return all of the bones and everything he did not intend to eat to the water. Then, he was told, the children would be able to come back to life. But, if he didn't return the bones, to the water, salmon child would not come back.

He did as he was told, but one day after he had eaten, when it came time for the children to come up to the village, from the stream, he heard one of them crying. He went to see what was wrong. The child was limping because one of its feet was gone. Then, the boy realized he had not thrown all of the fins back into the stream. he quickly found the one fin he had missed, and threw it in and the child was healed. After he had spent the winter with the Salmon People, it again was spring and time for them to return to the rivers. The boy swam with them, for he belonged to the Salmon People now. When they swam past his old village, his own mother caught him in her net. When she pulled him from the water, even though he was in the shape of a salmon, she saw the copper necklace he was wearing. It was the same necklace she had given her son.

She carried Salmon Boy carefully back home. She spoke to him and held him and gradually he began to shed his salmon skin; First, his head emerged. Then, after eight days, he shed all of the skin and was a human again. Salmon Boy taught the people all of the things he had learned. He was a healer now and helped them when they were sick.

"I can't stay with you long," he said, "you must remember what I teach you."

He remained with the people until the time came when the old salmon who had gone upstream and not been caught by the humans or the animal people came drifting back down toward the stream. As Salmon Boy stood by the water, he saw a huge old salmon floating down toward him. It was so worn by its journey that he could see through its sides. He recognized it as his own soul and he thrust his spear into it. As soon as he did so, he died. Then the people of the village did as he told them to do. They placed his

body into the river. It circled four times and then sank, going back to his home in the ocean, back to the Salmon People.⁸

SALMON TODAY

Today various organizations such as the Watersheds, Tribal Councils, US Fish & Wildlife, etc, try to help maintain salmon habitats that may be in potential danger or have been damaged. This is done through various means such as habitat restoration, monitoring, and building fish hatcheries.

⁸ Salmon Boy *NativeAmericanEncyclopedia.com Unabridged*. Retrieved January 15, 2014, from NativeAmericanEncyclopedia.com website: <http://nativeamericanencyclopedia.com/salmon-boy/>