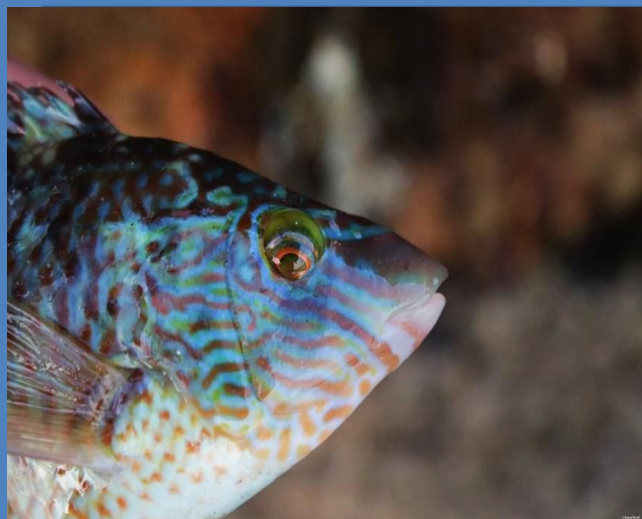


Common name
Corkwing wrasse

Scientific name
Symphodus melops



- This is not a large fish. It has a deep body which is compressed sideways with a single long dorsal fin. Also a black spot in the tail stalk. Usually around 15 centimetres long, it has been known to grow up to 25 centimetres. Males are brightly coloured dependent on background and age. Females, and juveniles, however, are brown or greenish-brown. Both sexes have lines on the head and gill covers; brown and pale blue on the female, bright green and blue on the male.
- They can live for 5 - 6 years
- They live around rocky shores amongst the seaweed and in large lower shore rock pools. They are widely distributed throughout the British Isles - but are most frequent in the south and west.
- Diet consists of small crustaceans, shrimps and small invertebrates.
- They are preyed upon by larger fish and birds
- Males build an elaborate nest of seaweed in either rock crevices or amongst seaweed or seagrasses in sedimentary areas, which they guard aggressively. The female lays eggs after a complex mating ritual. These are fertilised by the male. The male then looks after the fry until they swim away. If the female dies the next male in line becomes a female and produces eggs.



Photo by Gregory Bessant

Common name
Corkwing Wrasse

Scientific name
Symphodus melops

Description

This relatively small fish grows to about 15 cm, but can grow up to 25cm with a weight of approximately 250 grams. The male is a beautifully coloured fish with an iridescent sheen more prominent in summer during the breeding season. The female is larger and more dowdy, being brown to greenish-brown (as are juvenile fish). Both males and females have lines on the head and gill covers; brown and pale blue on the female, bright green and blue on the male. Colour can change rapidly, stimulated by the water and also on the whim of the fish, for example when in distress. They can live up to 5-6 years and live in pairs in groups.

Habitat and shelter

They are found in sheltered areas, normally on the lower shore amongst the seaweed but also on the reef where there is less chance of disturbance.

Feeding

They eat small crustaceans, shrimps and small invertebrates, utilising a beak to crack the shells of crustaceans and also fine feathery teeth which they then use to remove the shells altogether. They feed at dawn and dusk.

They are preyed upon by other fish and some birds.

Reproduction

Females lay hundreds of eggs under rocks and in seaweeds which are then fertilised by the male, in a complex mating ritual. The males have been seen to build a nest-like structure for the eggs, made out of seaweed in either the seaweed itself or amongst seagrasses in sedimentary areas. The nests are mound or ball-shaped with an entrance hole. They defend these aggressively while looking after the fry until they are able to swim.

Additional information

Widely distributed on British coasts but most frequent in the south and west. Globally they are found from Norway to Morocco, the Azores, the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. They have been found in Thanet waters, including the Walpole Bay Tidal Pool.

Fun facts

If a female dies, the next male in line becomes a female and produces eggs.

References

www.marlin.ac.uk

Scott Hutchison 29.04.2014

Completed by Lester Hovenden ; Edited Tony Child (2022)