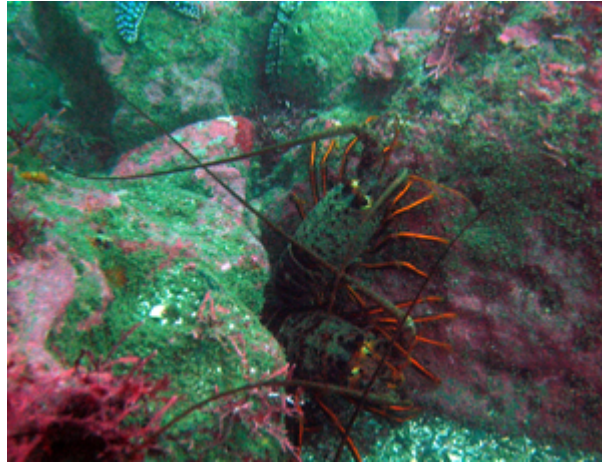


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[Spiny Lobsters More Active at Night](#)



California Spiny Lobster

California spiny lobsters in San Diego's Point Loma kelp bed travel from 50 meters to 1 kilometer every night scavenging for food. By morning, many return to a home ground of about 100 square meters. These are two main findings of a California Sea Grant/California Department of Fish and Game tagging study led by San Diego State University biology professor Kevin Hovel and Cal State Long Beach University biology professor Chris Lowe. "What the study says to me is 'wow,' lobsters move around a lot more at night than I thought," said Charlie Graham, a commercial fisherman in Santa Barbara who is familiar with Hovel's results. "The art of lobster fishing is deciding where and when to set traps," Graham said. "The research tells me I can be happy setting my traps a little farther from the beach and letting them (the lobsters) come to me. I don't have to risk losing a trap by putting it near the surf grass." Hovel's findings are based on two seasons of tagging and tracking data and on a series of dive surveys that let the scientists correlate lobster movement patterns with specific environmental features. "The take-home message is that lobsters move a lot," Hovel said. The average lobster moved about 400 meters a night, through there was a range of 50 meters to 1 kilometer. "We also showed lobsters moving among habitats more than expected," Hovel said. Lobsters journey from kelp forest to surf grass or vice versa are very often beneath under story algae. They do not return to any to specific shelters – a special rock crevice, ledge or rock pile, for example. Instead they seem to cleave to a particular area, usually about 100 square meters with many sheltering areas in it. The results of the study can help in stock assessment and in identifying habitat areas that are critical for sustaining a lobster fishery, he said.

Article excerpts used courtesy of the California Department of Fish and Game:

California Spiny Lobsters

The largest portion of the commercial and sport harvest is always taken during the first month of the season, October, which also is the highest month of trapping effort. The effort and catch drop off sharply in January through the middle of March (the season's end). San Diego County, being the most central to the spiny lobster's range, usually produces the highest landings, followed by Los Angeles/Orange, and Santa Barbara/Ventura counties.

Commercial and recreational lobster fishermen are restricted to a minimum size limit of 3 1/4 inches carapace length (CL). Historically, the season for both has run from early October to mid-March. Since 1992, the sport season has opened the weekend before the first Wednesday in October, the official commercial season opener. Commercial fish traps, including lobster traps, must have a destruct-device of a type approved by the Department of Fish and Game. This is to ensure that lost or abandoned traps do not continue to capture marine life indefinitely. Since the 1976-1977 season, it has been required that lobster traps be fitted with rectangular escape ports (2 3/8 by 11 1/2 inches) to minimize the retention of undersized lobsters. This requirement has been credited with reversing the long downward trend in landings previous to that.

Recreational harvesters need a valid sport fishing license with an ocean enhancement stamp, and may use hoop nets or bare (gloved) hands when skin or scuba diving for lobster. No appliance, such as a fish spear or a short hooked pole, may be used to snag the animals from deep crevices or caves. The daily bag limit for sport fishing is seven lobsters, reduced from 10 in 1971.

By Ed Zieralski, Staff Writer, San Diego Union Tribune, September 6, 2008:

The more Department of Fish and Game Captain Angel Raton looked through his binoculars, the less he could believe his eyes. There, walking away from a pier, was a fisherman with a rod and reel and a leash dragging behind him. But the fisherman wasn't walking a dog. It was a 5-pound lobster the man decided to "walk" off the pier. "It was one of the craziest things I ever saw," said Raton, who now oversees the South Coast region's game wardens. Raton cited the man, not for walking a lobster but for taking a California spiny lobster for a stroll out of season. It's just one of the many bizarre stories California game wardens have about our state's tastiest crustaceans.

They're simply known as "bugs" to many, but South Coast-based DFG warden Lance Weihe says wardens have a better nickname for spiny lobsters:

"Red Gold."

It's enough to make fools of fishermen. And just as the California Gold Rush produced its share of lawbreakers, the annual autumn and winter rush for this red gold by both recreational and commercial fishermen has led to abuses of the tasty treasure. Hoop-netting for lobsters and diving for them are at an all-time high in the state. The increase in

that fishing effort has forced the DFG and the Fish and Game Commission to introduce more control of this flourishing fishery.

Starting Sept. 27, the opening day of a recreational lobster season that extends to March 18, every person attempting to take spiny lobsters must have a **Spiny Lobster Report Card**. The cost is \$7.50, and the cards are available at the DFG's office, 4949 Viewridge Ave., and at many tackle stores.

Anglers 16 and older – whether they're hoop-netters or free or scuba divers – must have a fishing license and an Ocean Enhancement Stamp in addition to the lobster report card. Kids under 16, although not required to have a fishing license, must have a Spiny Lobster Report Card if they're accompanying adults on trips. Report cards also are required for people fishing from a pier, where a fishing license is not required.

The report card must be filled out immediately after fishing a certain spot. And if you dive from shore, the report card must be within 500 yards of the point of entry.

For example, say you've put out 10 hoop nets in San Diego Bay, catch three lobsters in a flat hoop net, but decide to move out to Zuniga Jetty for more. You must stop, fill out the card and then move. Each line represents one location, so it's possible to use three or four of the card's 56 available lines (or locations) in one night. Plus, each angler in the boat with a card must fill out his or her own card. It's not one card per boat. Anglers may buy another lobster card after completing their original card.

“There have been a lot of guys who take advantage of there being no controls on the lobster resource,” Corey Sanden, MC Swimbaits, said. “People hate hearing about controls, but there are people – maybe less than 10 percent, but enough – making a business out of it. Doing this will put a stop to that. This will be good for the resource and for sportsmen who play by the rules.”

Hoop-netting abuses in the lobster fishery are legendary in the inner circle of fishing. One case a number of years ago involved a hoop-netter who was caught, along with his fishing buddy, with 40 tailed lobsters and six undersized lobsters in his boat. Asked about it later by a reporter, the angler was brutally honest and forthright: “I don't have any comment other than to say I got real greedy and real stupid.”

But there is the valid argument that recreational fishermen are paying a higher price than commercial lobstermen to protect the resource.

Milo Vukovich, president of the Sonoma County Abalone Network, testified at the Fish and Game Commission and made a strong case that recreational fishermen are paying the tab for commercial take. Vukovich, citing DFG statistics, said the estimated 70,000 recreational lobster fishermen will pay \$525,000 compared with the \$94,000 the entire commercial lobster fleet pays in permits and landing taxes. Vukovich said commercial fishermen made more than \$8 million by harvesting 900,000 pounds of spiny lobsters in California last season. “They pay \$94,000, and you're asking recreational fishermen to pay \$525,000,” Vukovich said. “Asking the recreational anglers to pony up once again is adding insult to injury.”