

SALMON LIFE CYCLE

Most salmon species are anadromous, which means they're born in freshwater, migrate to the ocean on a journey that can be hundreds of miles long, and then return to freshwater to reproduce—most often, to the same stream in which they were born. After spawning, salmon die within a few weeks.

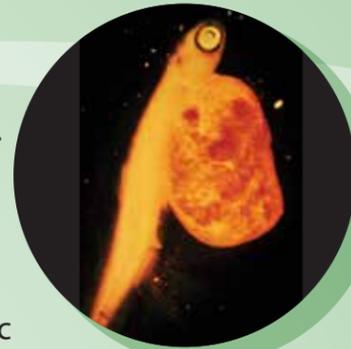
1. Incubation

In the fall, the female salmon chooses a site and digs a nest—called a redd—with her tail, then deposits up to 5,000 eggs, depending on the species. Females may make up to seven redds. One or more males fertilize the eggs.



2. Alevin

In late winter, the eggs hatch. At this stage, they're called alevins, and they live on the stream bottom, feeding from a yolk sac attached to their undersides. When the yolk sac is depleted, alevins must find food quickly.



3. Fry

Between 20 to 100 eggs survive to become juvenile salmon (or fry). The fry emerge from the stream bed and begin searching for insects to eat. Depending on their species, fry may spend hours or years in freshwater before beginning their journeys to the ocean.



4. Transitioning to saltwater

Estuaries are places where salt water meets freshwater. When salmon fry enter estuaries, their bodies begin to adapt to salt water—a process that's called smoltification. The length of time it takes a salmon to adjust to salt water depends on the species. When the process is complete, salmon head into the open ocean.



5. Adulthood and the ocean

Depending on their species and stock, salmon may spend anywhere from six months to five years in the ocean. Some travel thousands of miles during this time.



6. Returning home

After growing and feeding in the ocean, salmon return to freshwater to reproduce. Most return to their home stream. How they find their way remains a wonderful mystery.



7. The circle of life

Salmon face many challenges on their journey upstream, including obstacles and predators. Those that do make it to the spawning grounds die soon afterward.

