

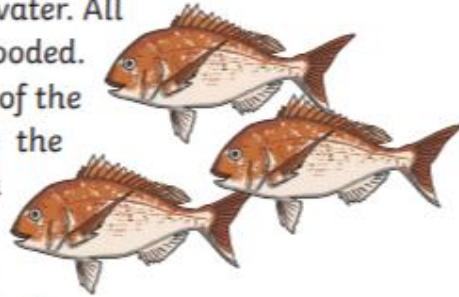
The Life Cycle of a Fish

Scientists estimate that there are over 30,000 known species of fish living in waters around the world and they suspect that there are more species still to be discovered. Fish are one of the oldest groups of animals on earth and have been here for millions of years. In fact, fish were here long before the dinosaurs!



Characteristics

Fish are very special creatures and have many unique characteristics. One such characteristic are their gills which help them to absorb oxygen from the water. All fish, unlike mammals, are cold-blooded. This means that the temperature of the water around the fish controls the body temperature of the fish. Fish also have well-developed senses of taste, touch and sight. Most fish swim in groups, called schools or shoals, to protect themselves from predators.



Fish Fact!

Fish can be carnivores, herbivores or omnivores.

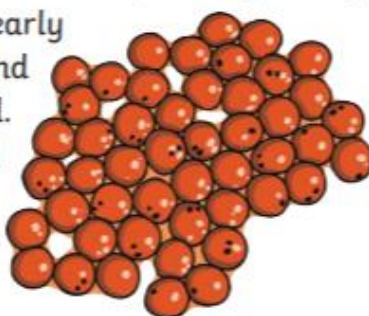


Life Cycle

Most species of fish have a very similar life cycle, although, the time spent in each stage differs from fish to fish. Nonetheless, the stages in the life cycle will go in the following order:

Stage 1

Each fish will begin its life as an egg. The female fish will lay a large number of eggs in a safe place in the water, usually among gravel, rocks or sand. During this early stage, the eggs are very vulnerable and can easily be disturbed or damaged. While in the egg stage, the fish will start to develop its organs and its tail. Species of fish that live in warm water will hatch from their eggs quicker than those in cold water.



Stage 2

When the eggs are ready to hatch, they become known as larvae. This is the second stage in the life cycle of a fish. Larvae have their own source of food called a yolk sac which is attached to their body. The yolk sac contains all the essential nutrients to feed the larva and to help it grow. The larva will survive off the yolk sac until it grows bigger and becomes able to feed itself.



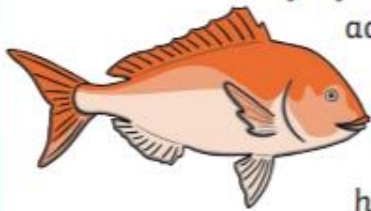
Stage 3

Once the larva has fully consumed the yolk sac, it enters the third stage in the life cycle of a fish. At this point the larvae become known as fry. Fry are very young fish. They are tiny in size, but most will get bigger quite quickly. Fry will start to eat by themselves and this is an important development for helping them to grow and get stronger.



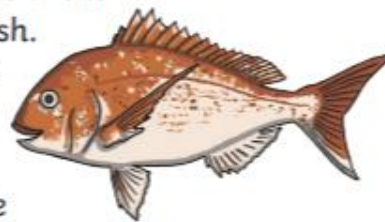
Stage 4

As the fry gets bigger it becomes known as a juvenile. The size of a juvenile is approximately the size of an adult finger. The fins and scales of the fish will grow and develop during this time. The juvenile will be much bigger and stronger than the fry, however, it will still be smaller and weaker than an adult fish.

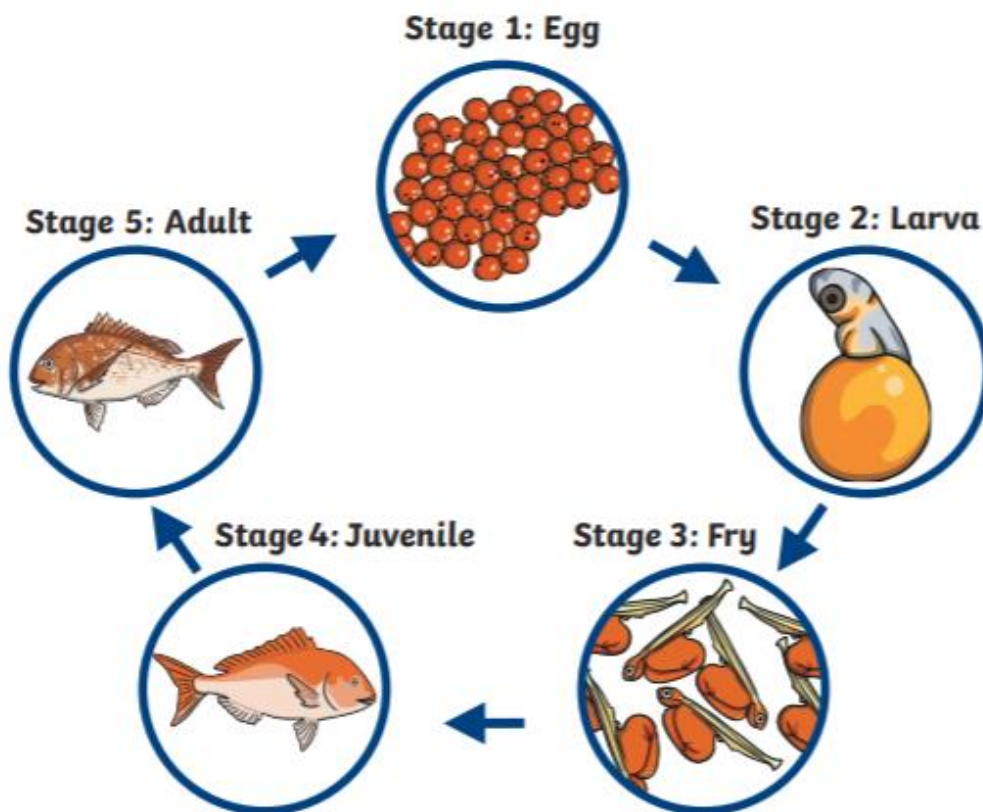


Stage 5

The final transition occurs when the juvenile fish becomes an adult fish. This is the last stage in the life cycle. The fish will now be fully grown and independent. The female fish can now lay new eggs and the life cycle will begin all over again.



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Fish Fact!

Fish live and travel in groups called schools or shoals.