



EMERALD KEEPERS

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For an Emerald Green, Ocean Blue Coronado

GRUNION RUNS RETURN



Grunion season has begun! Grunion runs in Coronado can be legendary, but you need good timing and a little luck to witness the mass of fish come ashore.

THE FISH

The silver-colored grunion is native to Southern California and northern Baja California. Measuring between 5 and 6 inches long, grunion revolve their lives around the phases of the moon and tidal patterns, as they are one of the few fish species that spawn on land.

Larger females are capable of producing up to 3,000 eggs every 2 weeks.

Eggs take about 10 days to hatch. Grunion hatch two or three minutes after eggs are freed from the sand by a high tide, and the babies are then washed out to sea. Grunion live two to three years.

THE RUN

High tides carry grunion ashore where they squirm and wriggle onto the beach propelled by their tails. The females dig until they are half buried with just their head sticking out and deposit their eggs into the sand. The males swiftly wrap themselves around the females to fertilize the eggs. The process is quick — as fast as 30 seconds — as the fish must return to the ocean before the tide recedes.

THE SCHEDULE

Between March and August, grunion runs occur over four nights during the highest tides timed with the lunar cycle. Grunion runs follow a full or new moon and last for two hours with the best viewing during the second hour of the second and third night, often around midnight.

The California Department

of Fish and Wildlife posts schedules of expected grunion runs before each season. The schedule varies for different San Diego beaches and some nights the grunion are a no-show. (wildlife.ca.gov/Fishing/Ocean/Grunion)

PROTECTION

Grunion runs are vital to the coastal ecosystem. The fish eggs provide a significant food source for shorebirds and other wildlife. California regulation prohibits disturbing the fish or their eggs during prime spawning season (April through June). During open fishing season (July through March), a fishing license is required to capture a maximum of 30 grunion, and they can only be taken by hand. Fishers have four chances to catch grunion this month (March 25-28) before the season closes in April for three months.

THREATS

Grunion populations have been declining for decades. Warming temperatures endanger the health of grunion and their eggs. Beach erosion, water pollution, and raking the sand to clear seaweed below the high tide line, as is done on Coronado beaches, also threaten grunion spawning habitats.

CORONADO VIEWING

Coronado's expansive shoreline makes an excellent spot for grunion watching. Avoid using flashlights that scare the fish and watch where you step as the vibrations from your feet can deter fish. Check with the local lifeguards for up-to-date information on optimal grunion-run viewing.

Protect our beaches and the grunion to keep Coronado Emerald Green, Ocean Blue.

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