



# Common SCULPIN of Cook Inlet



Sculpin are very diverse with 102 different species in Alaska. 17 species have been found in Kachemak Bay. Sculpin are commonly referred to as "bullheads" and many different sculpin are called "Irish lords". These labels are usually incorrectly used. Because they are not commercially important, very little is known about the details of their life history and their role in the food web of the ocean. Sculpin can be difficult to identify because of their diversity and due to differences between males and females.

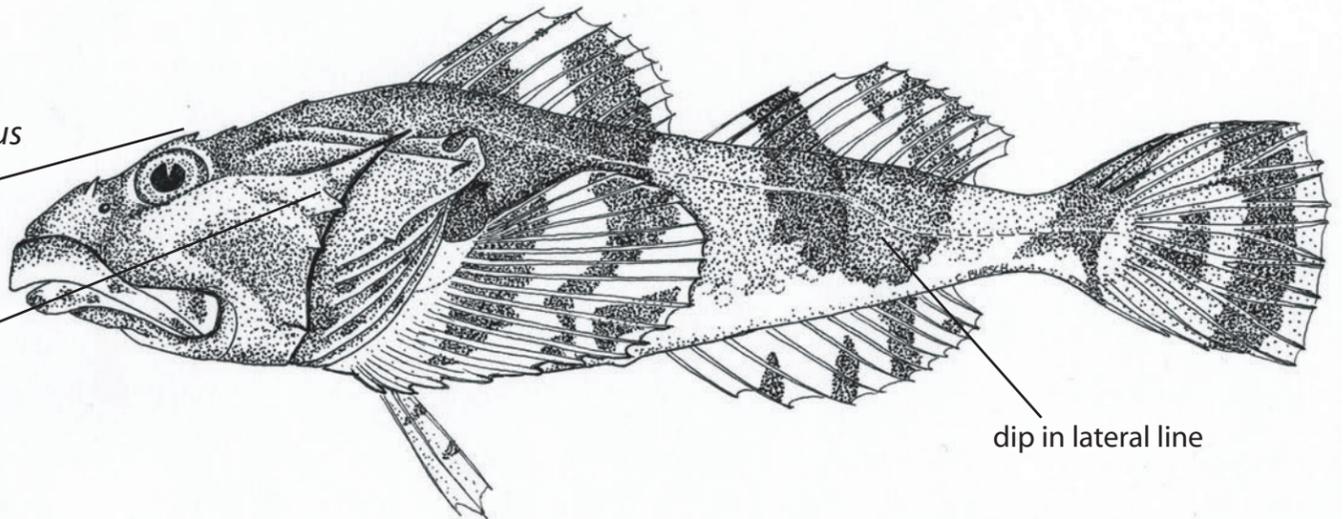
## great sculpin

*Myoxocephalus polyacanthocephalus*

spines present above eye and on upper back of head

very long, straight, smooth uppermost preopercular spine pointing upwards

length up to 30"



dip in lateral line

## plain sculpin

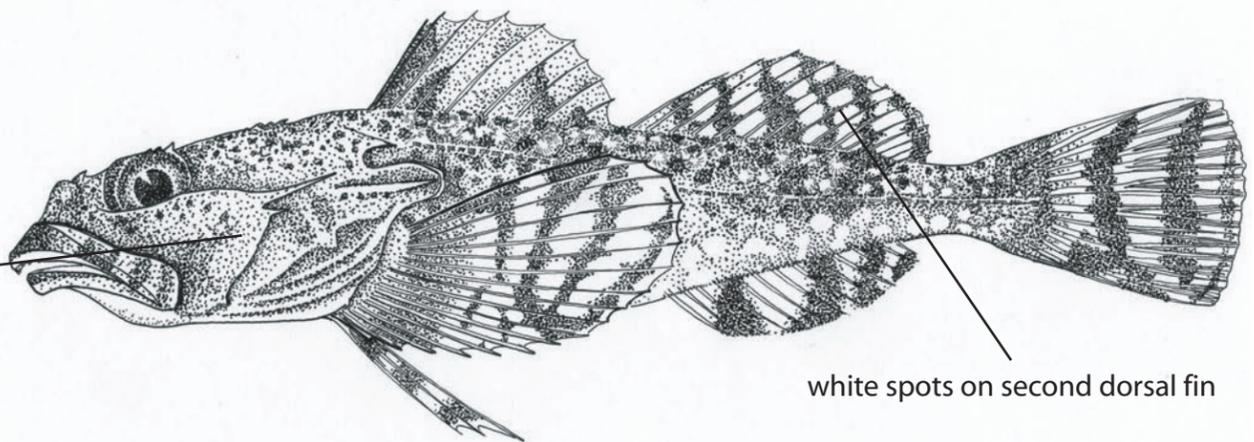
*Myoxocephalus jaok*

gray with many small black spots no saddles or bands on body

Usually 3 preopercular spines upper longest

white underside

length up to 23"



white spots on second dorsal fin

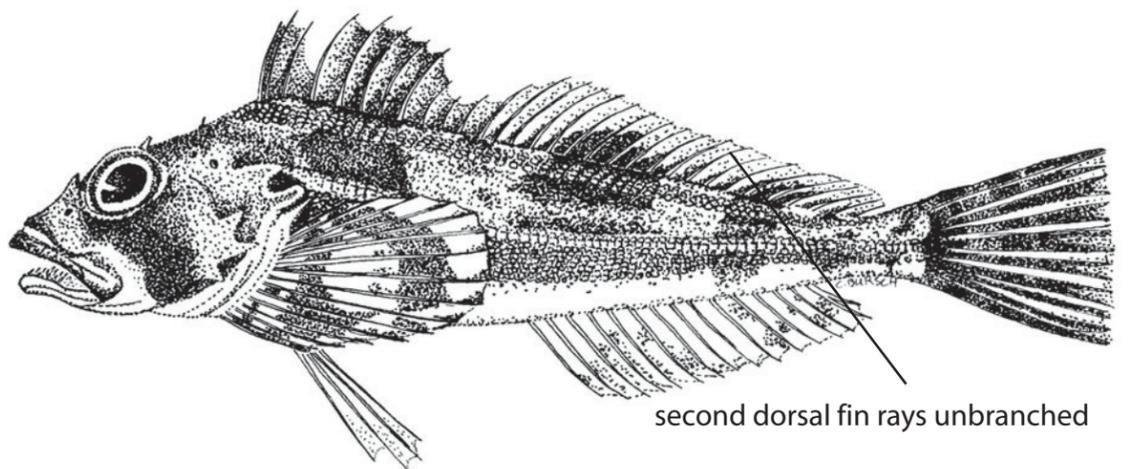
## yellow Irishlord

*Hemilepidotus jordani*

yellowish tan to dark brown

notch in first dorsal fin  
ciri on lip narrow  
gill membrane attached  
gill membranes yellow

length up to 19"



second dorsal fin rays unbranched

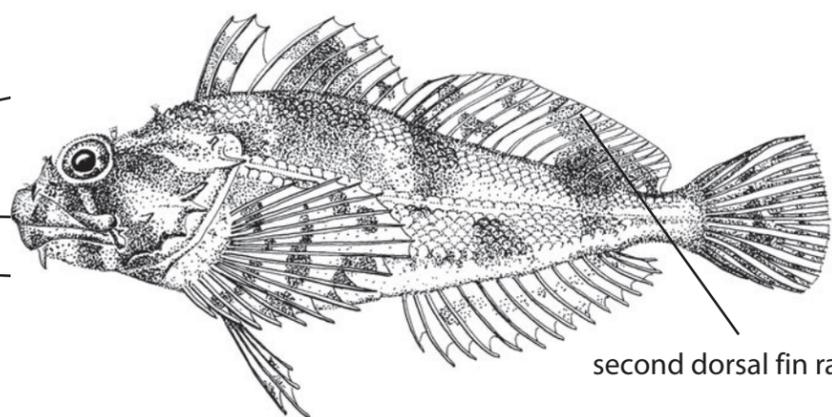
## red Irish lord

*Hemilepidotus hemilepidotus*

red to orange, pink, or brown

notch in first dorsal fin  
ciri on lip wide  
gill membrane attached

length rarely over 15"



second dorsal fin rays branched

## Pacific staghorn sculpin

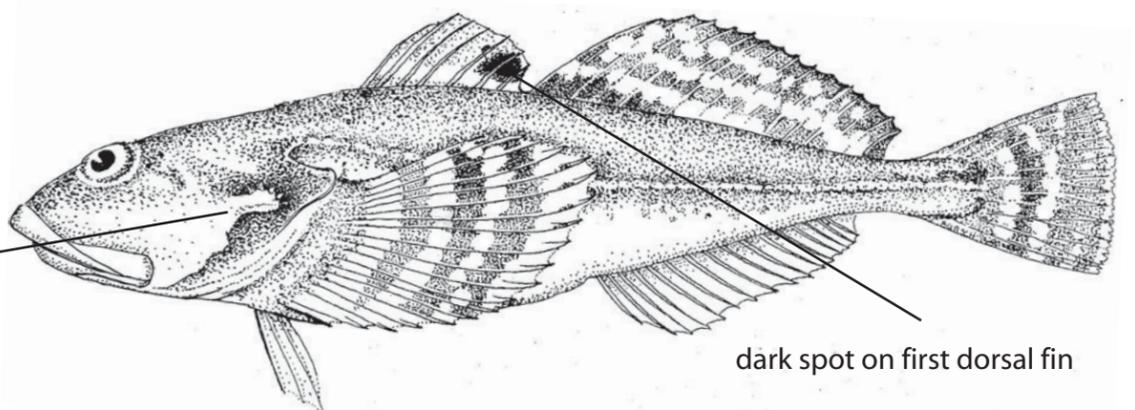
*Leptocottus armatus*

greenish brown with some yellow

smooth skin

2-6 prongs on preopercular spine like a "stag horn"

length up to 18"



dark spot on first dorsal fin



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Sculpin reproduction is unique. Females lay eggs in masses on various substrates. Fertilization by males can occur internally prior to this or externally after the eggs have been deposited. Males of many species guard the eggs from predators. The eggs eventually hatch and tiny planktonic larvae emerge to feed on microscopic life near the surface. Most eventually settle to the bottom of the ocean where they grow and mature into adults. They are distinguished from other groups of fish by not being completely covered with typical scales and by noticeable spines on their heads. They generally inhabit cold, northern coastal waters while some species live in fresh water.

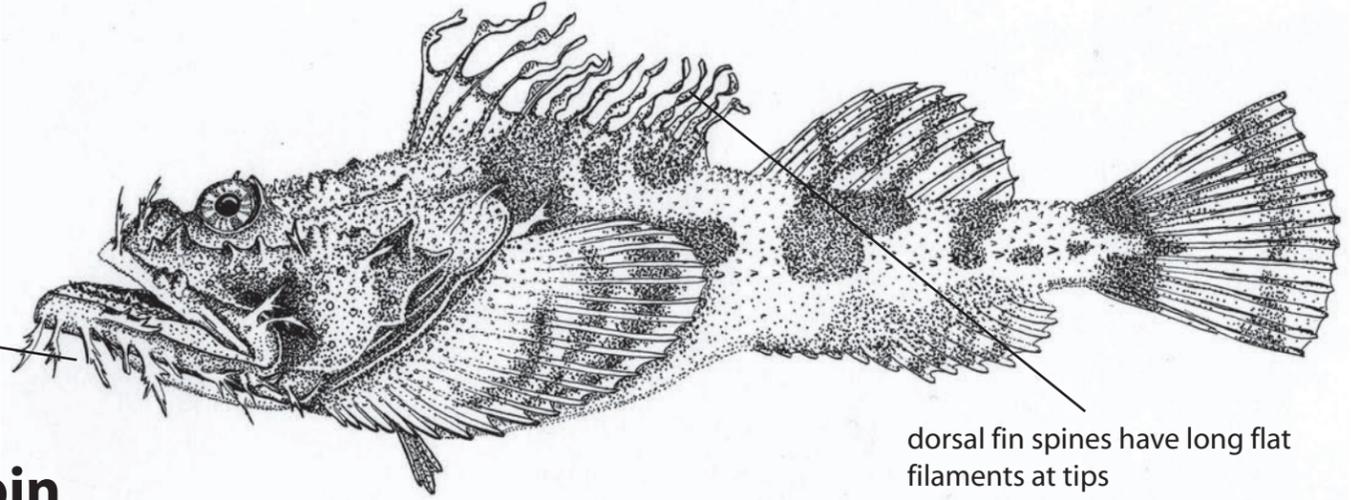
## bigmouth sculpin

*Hemitripterus bolinius*

mouth extremely large  
lips extending to the rear of eye

numerous blunt spines on head  
prickles cover body  
numerous complex cirri

length up to 28"



dorsal fin spines have long flat filaments at tips

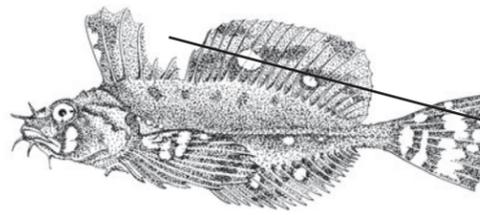
## silverspotted sculpin

*Blepsias cirrhosus*

brown or green on top  
red to yellow on underneath

bright silvery white patches  
below lateral line and on fins  
and cheeks

length to 7"



dorsal deeply notched  
nearly forming 2 fins

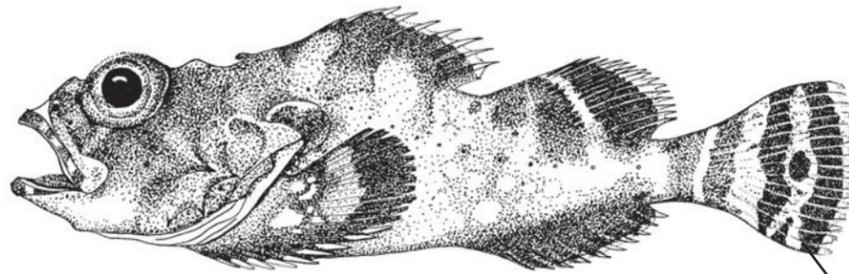
## darkfin sculpin

*Malacocottus zonurus*

light grayish brown  
fins with dark and light bands

in the 'fathead' sculpin group  
loose skin over gelatinous flesh

length up to 13"



tail with black bands

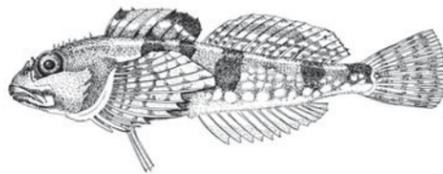
## tidepool sculpin

*Oligocottus maculosus*

greenish gray to reddish  
spotted and mottled  
dark saddles

no scales or prickles  
commonly found  
in tidepools

length up to 3.5"

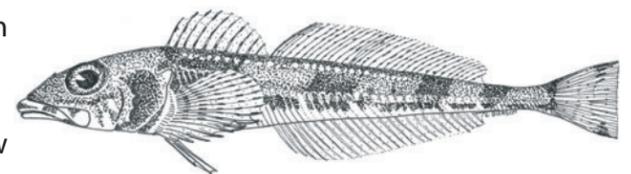


## ribbed sculpin

*Triglops pingelii*

olive  
brown on back  
whitish underneath  
fine diagonal lines  
across body  
black streaks below  
lateral line

length up to 7"

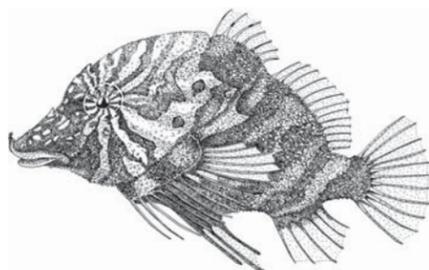


## grunt sculpin

*Rhamphocottus richardsonii*

large head  
long snout  
high back  
tail and fins red  
"walks" on pectoral fins  
makes a grunting noise

length up to 3.5"



## slimy sculpin

*Cottus cognatus*

lives in fresh water lakes and streams

dark brown, green or gray  
often with orange tint

first dorsal fin dark at base

length up to 3"

