

WRASSE

Identification Card

Ballan wrasse (*Labrus bergylta* L.)

Ainm Gaeilge: Ballach breac; Ballán

Up to 65 cm. Larger fish develop a stocky body shape, young fish are comparatively slim. Colour is highly variable, usually green, brown or reddish with a mottled pattern or a light irregular stripe along the flank but without typical marks. The edge of the pre-operculum is smooth (arrow).



Corkwing wrasse (*Symphodus melops*)

Ainm Gaeilge: Bochar

Up to 28 cm. High back, colour is variable. Males are often greenish or blue and females brownish-yellow. Corkwing have a striped pattern on the gill cover and can have a distinctive black spot in front of the tail and behind the eye (inserts). The genital papilla can be dark blue in the breeding season, the pre-operculum is serrated (inserts).



Goldsinny wrasse (*Ctenolabrus rupestris*)

Ainm Gaeilge: Bod Gorm

Up to 18 cm. Slender body shape, usually reddish brown in colour, characteristic black spot in front of the tail fin and less visibly on the frontal dorsal fin (insert). Serrated pre-operculum.



Rock cook wrasse (*Centrolabrus exoletus*)

Ainm Gaeilge: Ballach Béal-beag

Up to 18 cm. Small, oval body shape, comparatively small head and mouth. Colour is variable, usually greenish or brown. Rock cook can have bright blue striped patterns on the head and blue colour can extend to the back and dorsal fin. A typical black band can be visible at the base of the tail fin (insert). The pre-operculum is serrated, there are 4-6 hard spines in anal fin (3 in other species).



Cuckoo wrasse (*Labrus mixtus*)

Ainm Gaeilge: Ballach Muire

Up to 40cm (males); 30cm (females). Slender body and long snout. Males are bright blue and yellow, females are reddish-brown with three black and white spots on the back (Arrows). Pre-operculum is smooth.



Wrasse species are used by fish farmers as cleaner-fish for removing sea lice from salmonids in sea pens. Ballan wrasse are farmed for this purpose in Norway and Scotland but the Irish Farmed Salmon industry relies entirely on wild caught wrasse. Eight species of wrasse are native to Northern Europe, though only 5 are commonly caught and used as cleaner fish. These are Ballan wrasse, Corkwing wrasse, Goldsinny wrasse, Rock Cook wrasse and Cuckoo wrasse. In Ireland, Ballan and Corkwing are the most commonly caught species, but the species present can vary hugely depending on the fishing area. Other wrasse species found in northern European waters, namely Baillons wrasse, Rainbow wrasse and Scale rayed wrasse are not caught regularly in Ireland and are not included in this guide.

This BIM card is produced primarily as an aid to help inshore fisherman identify the different wrasse species of use to the salmonid farming sector for the biological control of sea lice

Species of Wrasse common to Ireland

English Name	Scientific Name	Ainm Gaeilge
Ballan wrasse	<i>Labrus bergylta</i> Ascanius	Ballach breac; Ballán
Corkwing wrasse	<i>Symphodus melop</i>	Bochar
Goldsinny wrasse	<i>Ctenolabrus rupestris</i>	Bod gorm
Rock cook wrasse	<i>Centrolabrus exoletus</i>	Ballach béal-beag
Cuckoo wrasse	<i>Labrus mixtus</i>	Ballach Muire

Identifying wrasse

Distinct external marks can be used to tell wrasse species apart, but these are not always visible and the colour of wrasse can be highly variable. Colour can differ between individuals as well as with age, season or sex of the fish. Identification criteria other than body colour are therefore necessary to tell wrasse species apart. These other criteria include head shape, patterns or absence of patterns on the gill cover, the edge of the pre-operculum (smooth in Ballan and Cuckoo wrasse, serrated in others) or number of hard spines in the anal fin. Further criteria such as fin rays, scales, teeth etc. can be used but are not usually necessary for practical differentiation and are not included in this guide.

Catching, handling and storing Wrasse guidelines

- Wrasse have sharp spines, especially on the front part of the dorsal fin, which they raise in defence when threatened. This must be considered when handling wrasse to avoid personal injury.
- Wrasse are easily injured during capture and storage and it is very important to treat them as gently as possible: handling, time out of water, holding and transport times should be kept to a minimum.
- Traps should be checked at least once a day and should not be raised to the surface too quickly.
- All equipment must be in good working order, well maintained and without sharp edges or rough surfaces that can lead to injury. Any fish injured during capture should be released or killed humanely through a blow to the head if injuries are severe.
- If using dip nets, only a few wrasse should be netted at a time and smooth nets with no knots are preferable.
- It is important to avoid rapid changes in water temperature when transferring wrasse between or into tanks and wrasse should always be kept in good quality sea water with a minimum of 80% oxygen saturation.
- They should be stored with enough space, cover (like artificial kelp) and food should be provided. A lid on holding tanks reduces stress and aggression can be reduced by sorting wrasse by size if this is possible.
- Dead or injured fish should be removed as regularly as possible.