

2012
ISSUE
3

NATURE

CONSERVANCY



Water Colors

.....
MAKING A FINE ART
OF OCEAN
CONSERVATION

INSIDE: JIMMY CARTER'S RIVERS

| WHOOPING CRANES WIN

| HEALTHY PEOPLE, HEALTHY FORESTS





BY JASON KERSTEN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON HOUSTON

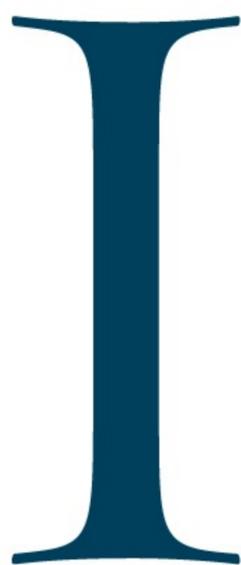
WATER COLORS

Using the tools of his trade, artist James Prosek does more than capture the wild beauty of Atlantic fish—he paints a compelling case for protecting them.



(Above) **Jack Crevalle**, *Caranx hippos*, Marco Island, Florida.





In 2001, artist, writer and naturalist James Prosek was driving by a Citgo gas station in Cape Cod when something beautiful caught his eye. Its color, lines and curves—its gleaming perfection—were unlike anything Prosek had ever seen. He pulled into the station and walked inside to inquire about it.



“Whose old Chevy truck is that out front?” he asked the station’s owner. “It’s amazing.”

The station’s owner, Norman St. Pierre, explained that the ’54 Chevy belonged to a friend and invited Prosek into his office. There the artist saw another, even more fascinating object, one that would launch him on a 10-year journey.

It was just an old photograph of a commercial fishing vessel. But the fish on its deck—bluefin tuna—were massive, bigger than men. And Prosek, who, as the author and artist of *Trout: An Illustrated History* and *Trout of the World*, has perhaps painted more fish than just about any other person alive, was stunned. Then and

there, he knew that he wanted to see a bluefin for himself and paint it as he saw it the moment it came out of the water, lit by both the light of the sun and its own internal fire.

“I don’t think a lot of people understand how monumental some of these creatures are,” Prosek says 11 years later as he sits on the floor of his studio in Easton, Connecticut, contemplating the life-size watercolor of a bluefin tuna on his wall.

For Prosek, rendering a nine-and-a-half-foot-long, 750-pound bluefin to scale was an inherently preservational act. Bluefin populations—along with those of numerous other Atlantic game species—are perilously low.





Nassau Grouper, *Epinephelus striatus*, South Andros Island, Bahamas

Nassau Grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*)
pregnant fish caught in traps by Tinker Rohl
South Andros, Bahamas.





“An individual fish has all these beautiful marks and scratches just from living.”

Western Atlantic bluefin, in fact, are estimated to be at less than 3 percent of their 1960 levels. The once-ubiquitous fish are now so rare that a single giant bluefin can fetch thousands of dollars in a Japanese market.

Prosek finally got to see his live bluefin with the help of St. Pierre. The station owner also happened to be a Cesna pilot who spotted tuna for a harpoon boat. Through the brotherhood of fishermen, he eventually snagged Prosek a privileged spot on a boat.

The bluefin was just the beginning. Prosek eventually set out to paint an entire collection of life-size Atlantic game fish—the same species that we want to both save and savor.

“I wanted to paint fish that are important to humans. Mostly food and game fish—a lot of them are being exploited. But also some of the larger or more colorful or hard-fighting or magnificent fish in the Atlantic,” says Prosek.

This deeply personal endeavor would take the artist to the far corners of the Atlantic, including the Cape Verde Islands, the Bahamas, Florida, Rhode Island and Montauk, Long Island. He would see and paint 35 fish in all—giants like swordfish and big blue marlin, and dinner-table staples like Nassau grouper and tautog.

For Prosek, painting and preserving nature are inseparable. “Without these sources of awe and inspiration, we would have no faith, we would have no spirituality, we’d have no art,” he says. “They’re the sources of everything that we are. Without [nature], it would be a very pale and depressing existence.”

No two paintings (or fish) are alike. But each image clearly captures the animal’s beauty in a fleeting moment when the fish—still vibrant, still emanating colors that will drain away only with death—is pulled from its world and enters ours. ■





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WATCH

James Prosek
travels from
sea to studio
to paint life-size
fish portraits.



TAP to view



.....

LISTEN to Prosek discuss why his paintings include more than just fish.

AUDIO © JASON KERSTEN



Black Land Crab, South Andros Island.

*Mutton Snapper (Lutjanus analis)
South Andros Island, Bahamas, Deep Creek*



*Four stages of a mangrove leaf.
South Andros, Bahamas*

James Prosek 2012

Mutton Snapper, *Lutjanus analis*, South Andros Island, Bahamas

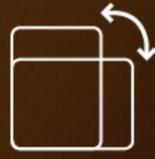




◀ **SWIPE** to explore the artist's studio ▶

WORK OF ART: Prosek may spend up to 14 hours a day in his studio, where he prefers to paint in a mix of natural and artificial light.





TAP then **ROTATE**
to view a slideshow.



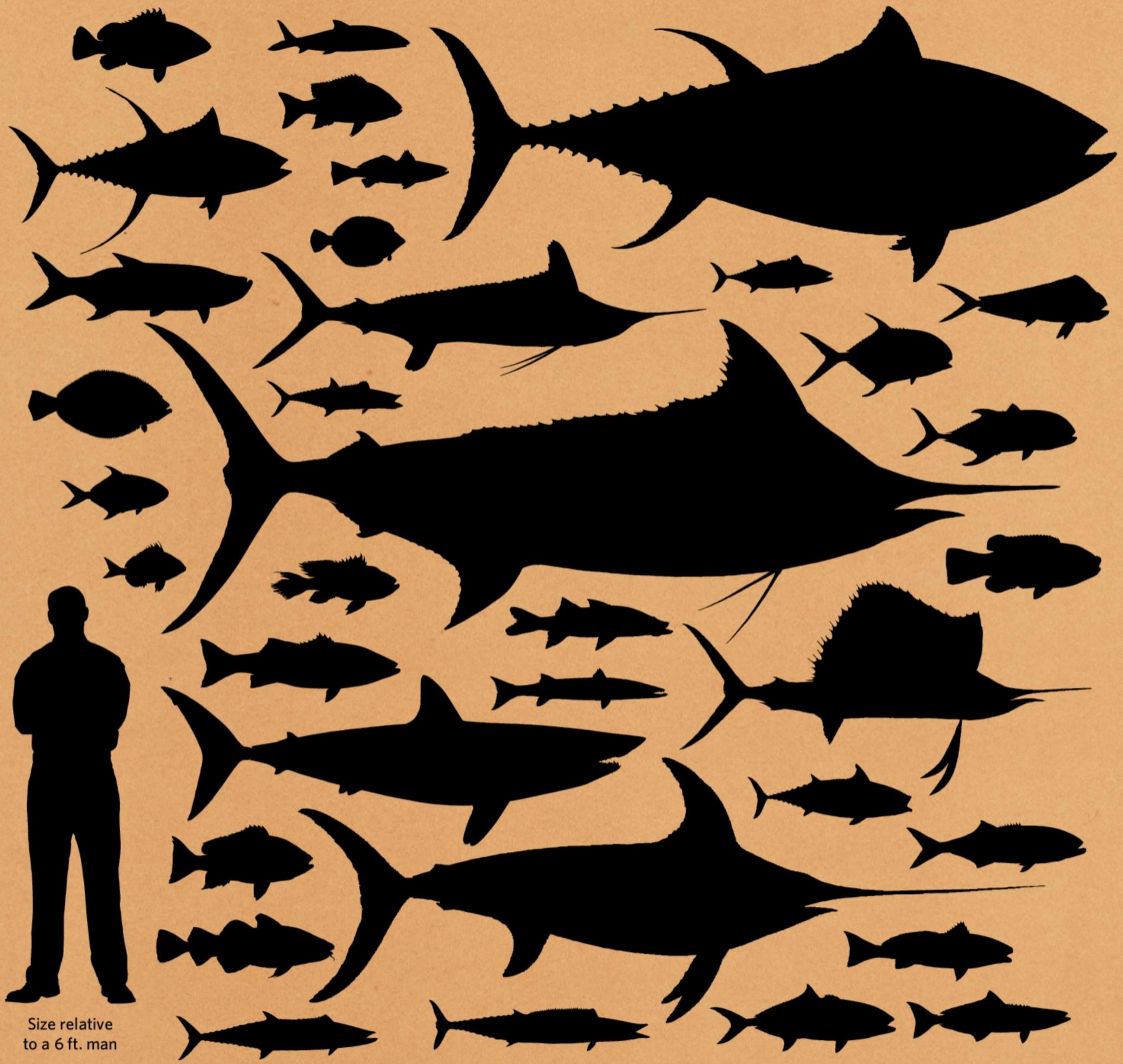




Go Fish

Size up Prosek's subjects and find out which species are most in need of protection.

- Not Evaluated +
- Least Concern +
- Near Threatened +
- Vulnerable +
- Endangered +



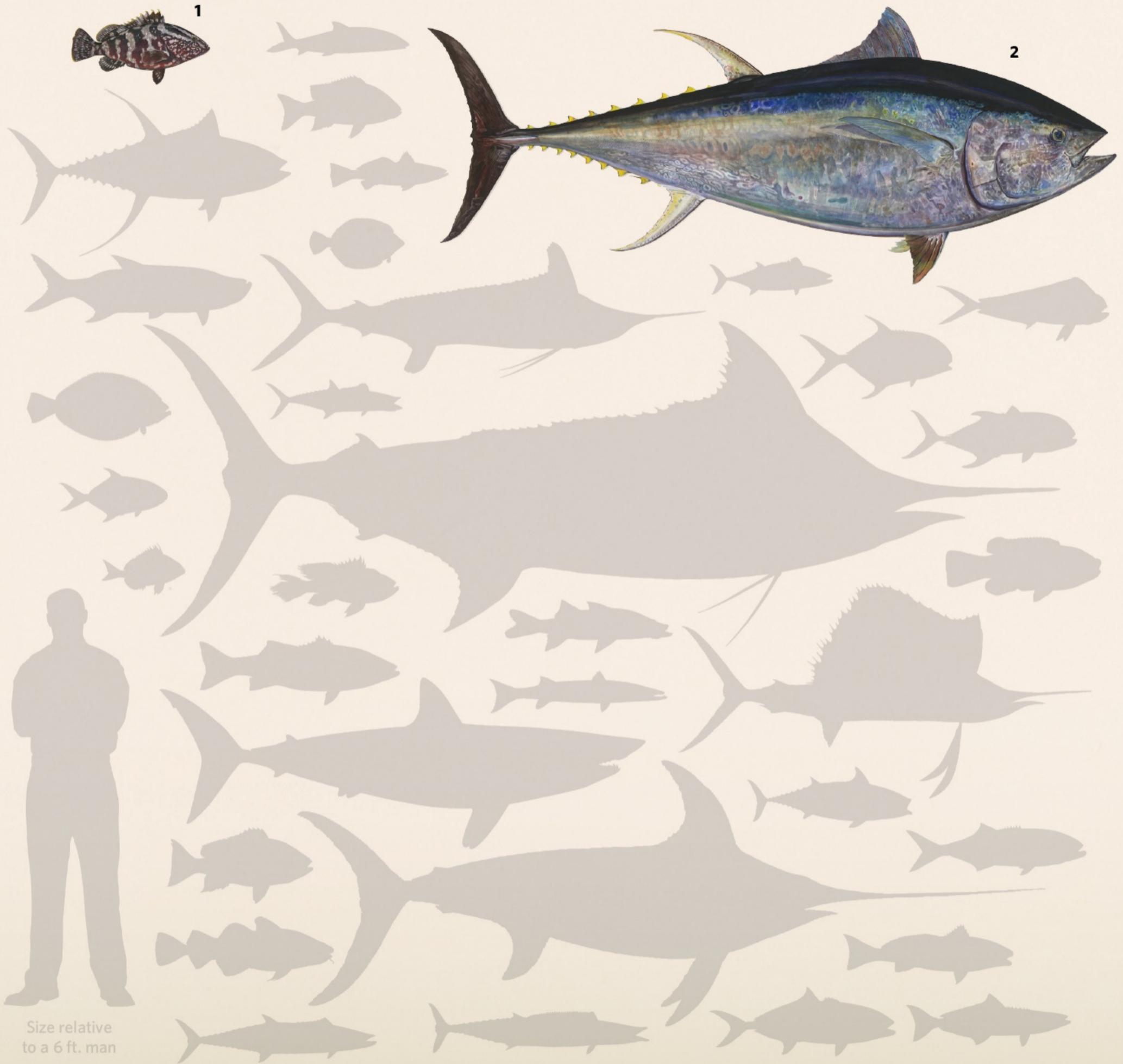
Size relative to a 6 ft. man



Go Fish

Size up Prosek's subjects and find out which species are most in need of protection.

Endangered: Species face a very high risk of extinction in the wild.



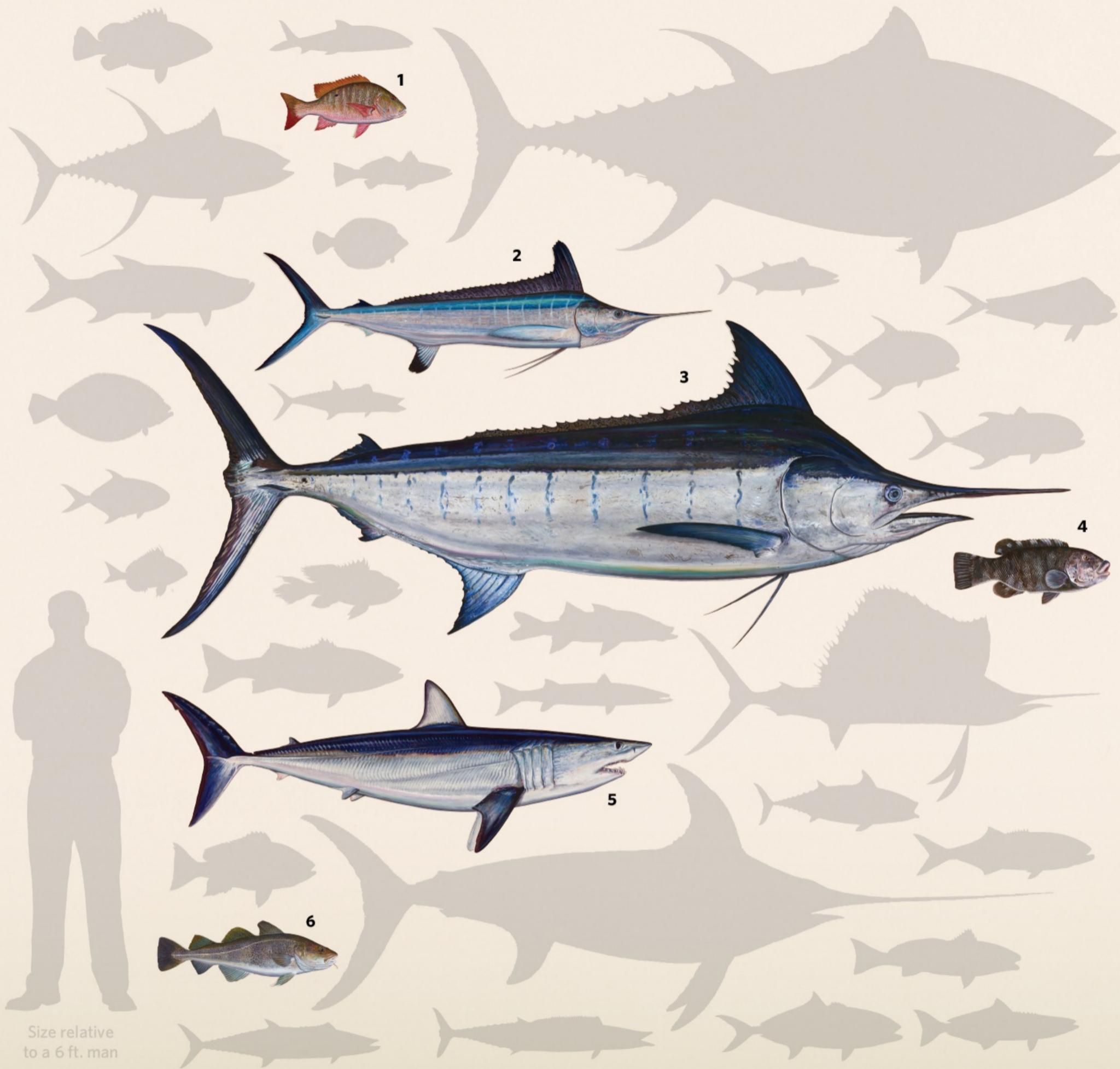
1 Nassau Grouper, 2 Bluefin Tuna



Go Fish

Size up Prosek's subjects and find out which species are most in need of protection.

Vulnerable: Species face a high risk of extinction in the wild.



Size relative
to a 6 ft. man

1 Mutton Snapper, **2** White Marlin, **3** Blue Marlin, **4** Blackfish, **5** Mako Shark, **6** Atlantic Cod

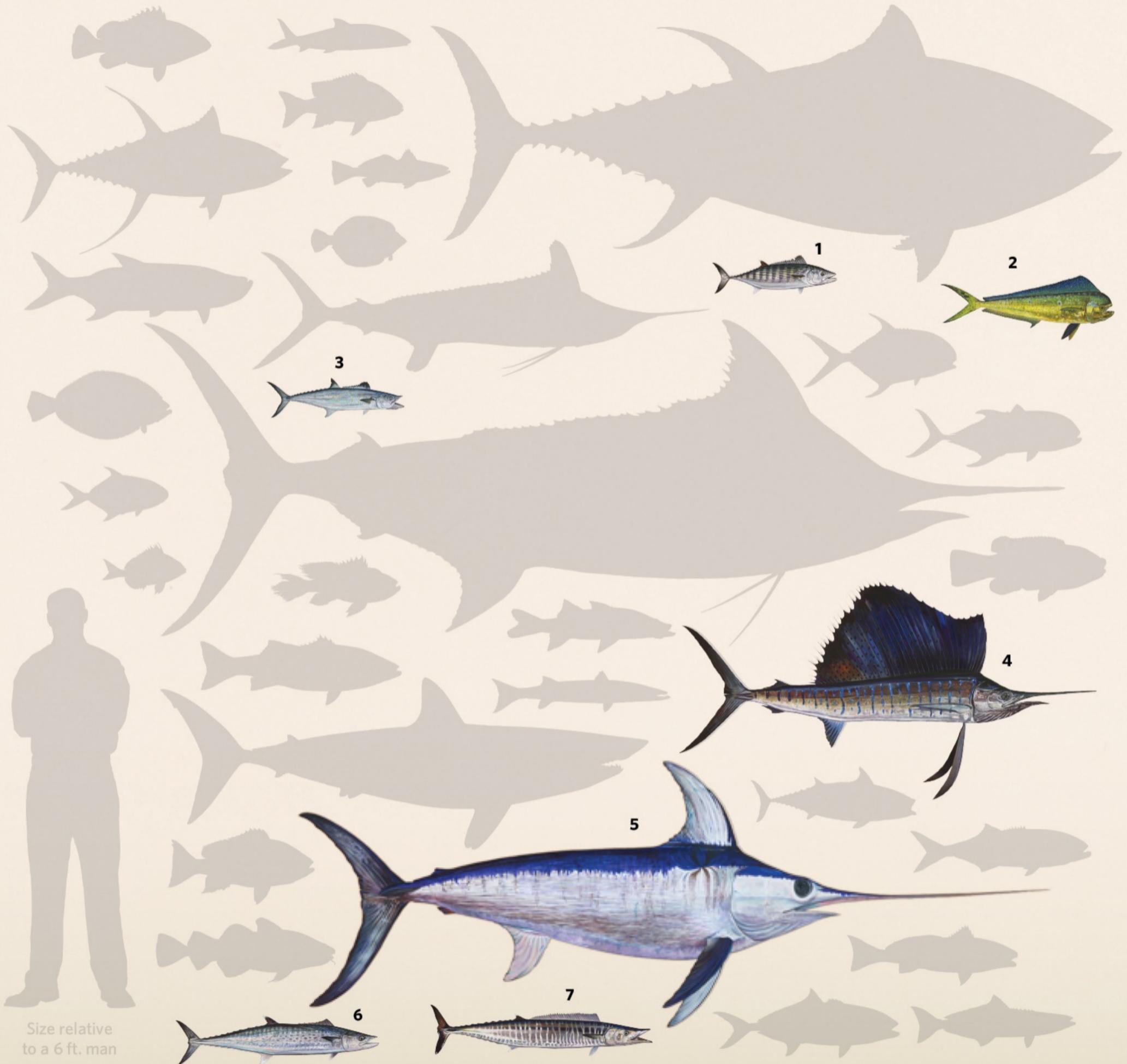
Conservation status according to IUCN Red List



Go Fish

Size up Prosek's subjects and find out which species are most in need of protection.

Least Concern: Species are widespread and abundant.



1 King Mackerel, **2** Dorado, **3** Spanish Mackerel, **4** Sailfish, **5** Swordfish, **6** Bonito, **7** Wahoo

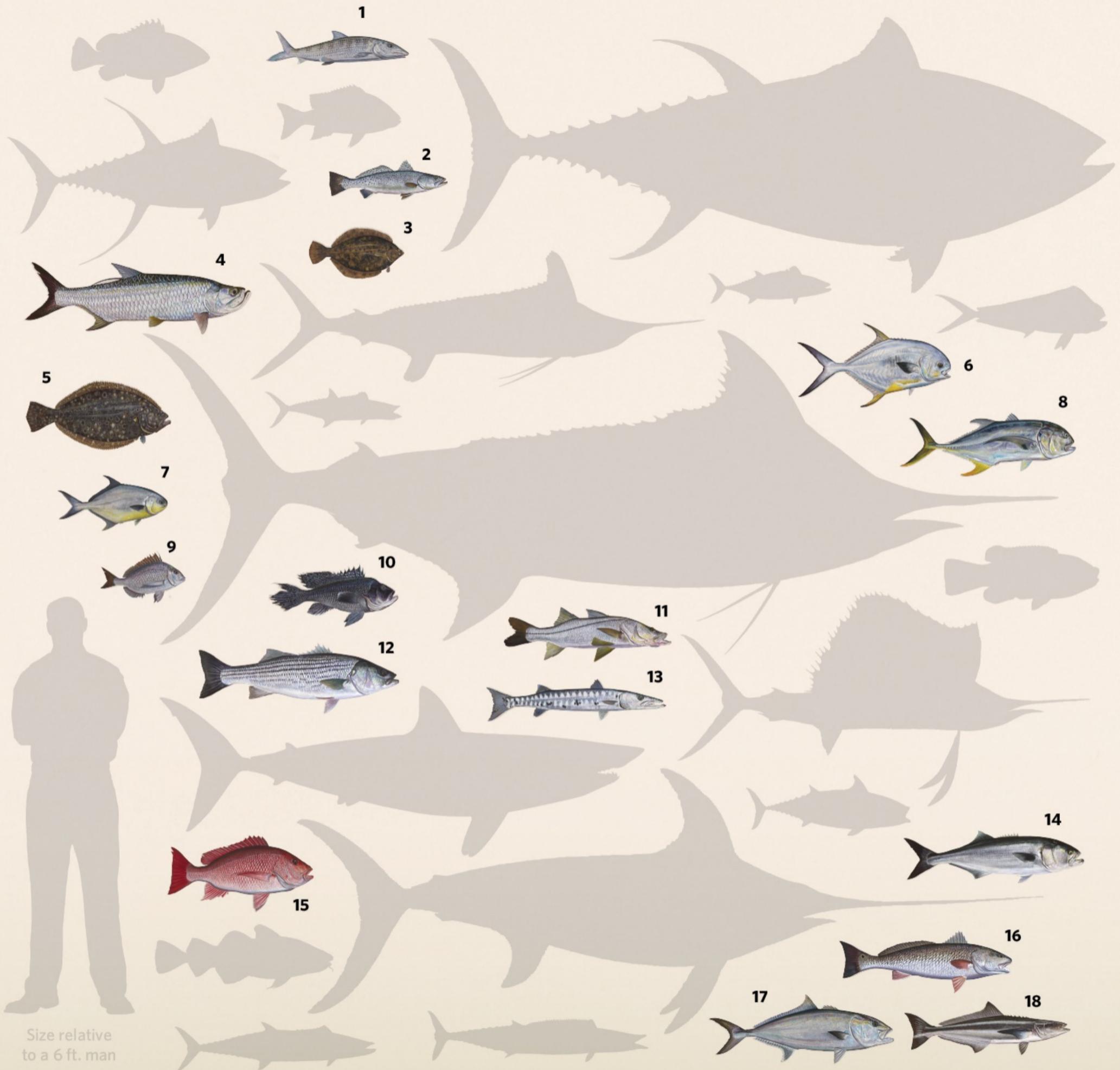
Conservation status according to IUCN Red List



Go Fish

Size up Prosek's subjects and find out which species are most in need of protection.

Not Evaluated: Risk of extinction has not yet been evaluated for these species.



Size relative
to a 6 ft. man

1 Bonefish, **2** Sea Trout, **3** Winter Flounder, **4** Tarpon, **5** Fluke, **6** Permit, **7** Florida Pompano, **8** Jack Crevalle, **9** Porgy, **10** Black Sea Bass, **11** Common Snook, **12** Striped Bass, **13** Barracuda, **14** Bluefish, **15** Red Snapper, **16** Red Drum, **17** Amberjack, **18** Cobia

Conservation status according to IUCN Red List





WIPE the fish to reveal its living colors.



Dorado, *Coryphaena hippurus*, Andros Island, Bahamas



.....

SHARE

Send us your nature-inspired artwork!
Submit your best painting, illustration and more.



conch shell





WIPE the fish to reveal its living colors.



Dorado, *Coryphaena hippurus*, Andros Island, Bahamas



.....

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