



Global Catch: Portraits of a Precious Resource

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As a marine scientist focusing the majority of my academic career on fisheries, I have personally witnessed the tremendous declines in fish populations and the devastation happening to our oceans. A microcosm of this can be documented at local and commercial fish markets around the globe. This observation inspired me to document fish markets and how different cultures approach the consumption of seafood. It is estimated that global production of aquatic animals reached an all-time high of over 223 million tonnes in 2022, with over 90 million tonnes coming from capture fisheries and more than 600 million people involved in the fishery supply chain.¹

In my photographic journey, I explore fish markets of the world and the various ways in which cultures use fish, in an effort to open eyes to the incredible diversity of life in the oceans and how people consume and value this vanishing resource. What I have found in my quest to document this consumption is that many of the largest consumers of seafood appreciate the resource in a way I could never have imagined. The fish are treated as precious jewels, carefully handled and displayed in vivid colors. The markets also serve as a means to study the great diversity of seafood. More and more, I am seeing imported fish where, previously, there was only locally sourced seafood. Nearly every market, whether it is in Tokyo or a small village in China, is selling farmed salmon and other imported products.

In the end, “Global Catch” captures the story of the love affair that different cultures have with seafood, while highlighting the unsustainable nature of this appreciation. While consumers and fish-mongers may value this resource, it does not stop them from overconsuming and depleting the oceans. They simply adapt and bring in other fish to sell.

(pictured left)

Salmon just after harvest in British Columbia, Canada. Over the years, salmon has become more and more common in fish markets around the world. While this is sustainably caught wild salmon, most salmon in the markets is from highly problematic and polluting fish farms. Open-pen fish farms, like the ones commonly used for salmon, often introduce disease and parasites into the surrounding ocean, while also polluting with pesticides, antibiotics, and waste, creating problems for wild populations and the surrounding habitat.

¹ *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024: Blue Transformation in Action* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2024), 12.





(pictured above)

In a remote village in central China, two women sit on the side of a street, selling fish. Although far from the ocean, they are selling ocean fish that have been preserved in salt, along with some small shrimps.

(pictured left)

On the outskirts of Shanghai, China, a small fish stand has a variety of seafood products. Among the geoduck clams and pinnidae clams, farmed salmon is becoming increasingly available. The amount of imported and farmed seafood has increased dramatically as local fisheries have declined.



The scale of the Tsukiji Market in Tokyo is immense, highlighted by a man riding his bicycle through the narrow corridors. The market spans many blocks and the diversity of fish and invertebrates is unparalleled. I found myself dodging different types of vehicles while wandering in the market.



An Atlantic bluefin tuna, just caught in the waters off North Carolina, is beheaded and gutted before being packed in ice and shipped express overnight to Japan where it will be auctioned the following day. At the height of the market, a single bluefin could sell for over 1 million US dollars, making their trade more like that of a precious commodity, with prices and value increasing as they become more scarce.



A Pacific bluefin tuna loin is displayed like a precious jewel in a glass case at Tsukiji Market, Tokyo, Japan. While the Japanese appreciate the beauty of this majestic fish, populations of bluefin worldwide have dwindled from their historic levels in the face of increased harvest and consumption, primarily by the Japanese sashimi market. However, better scientific understanding and management have led to a recent uptick in bluefin populations, giving me hope that this fish will remain in the ocean in the future, provided that conservation measures are kept in place.



At the tuna auctions at Tsukiji Market, Tokyo, frozen bluefin are lined up by the dozen for inspection. The tuna buyers carefully inspect every tuna for fat content and quality of the flesh before the auction begins. The bluefin are marked with red paint and tags to identify them for auction. The sheer number of bluefin in the auction room is staggering, especially considering that this auction takes place nearly every day.



Once the bluefin are purchased at auction, they are brought to individual stalls within the Tsukiji Market, Tokyo, where they are portioned for sale to restaurants and other retailers. Sushi chefs build relationships with particular sellers, relying on their ability to choose the best tuna. Here, a father and son move a large tuna loin onto their cutting table. I was struck by the appreciation these men had for the seafood. Every fish and invertebrate is handled with respect. From the careful way the fishmongers kill the fish, to the specialized blades they use to filet the fish, to the beautiful displays, these fish are valued in a way I did not previously fully understand.



Prepared tuna on display for purchase and sampling at Tsukiji Market, Tokyo, where tuna reigns supreme.



I am always struck when I see a fish on display that I have never seen before and didn't know existed. This was the case with the spotted knifejaw on display with the groupers at Tsukiji Market, Tokyo. Visiting these markets adds to my understanding of the diversity of life in the oceans.



Fish large and small are for sale at Tsukiji Market in Tokyo, Japan—countless species from soldierfish to squid are present. Over time, the shifts of species displayed can serve as a metric of the health of the ocean as the species shift depending on availability.



At the Noryangjin Fish Market in Seoul, Korea, the diversity of invertebrates for sale was unlike anything I had ever seen. In this photo, a vast array of prawns is carefully displayed.



In Korea, monkfish liver is highly prized. At the Noryangjin Fish Market in Seoul, monkfish, caught in the North Atlantic, most likely off the coast of the United States, are displayed to show off their organs and the size of their livers. This is very different from how fish are carefully fileted in the United States.



Tanks filled with different species of abalone line the corridors of the Noryangjin Market in Seoul. Any invertebrate biologist would have a field day with the diversity of species on display. Many of the fish and invertebrates are sold live in these markets.