

Fish + Fishings

✓ Second deep-sea fish found ashore

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SANTA CRUZ — Another monstrous-looking longnosed lancetfish was found Wednesday morning, this time by a woman walking through tidepools near Waddell Creek.

It was the second straight day one of the rarely seen deep-sea fish was found on a local beach.

"They are very rare. This is unusual," said Robert Lea, a biologist with the state Department of Fish and Game in Monterey who charts sightings of rare sea creatures. "Usually there's one or two a year caught up and down the whole state."

On Monday, a fisherman pulled one from the surf in Fort Bragg north of San Francisco, Lea said.

Tuesday, Hank Scott, a local contractor, yanked one from the surf with his bare hands after he saw it thrashing in shallow water off 18th Avenue.

Wednesday morning, Julie Uecker was strolling on Waddell Creek Beach when she spotted the four-foot iridescent carcass left behind by the surf.

"It was just beautiful," Uecker said. "I picked it up and three small fish, babies came out. I thought it was a barracuda."

She took it to Arro's Country Store in Davenport, where shopkeeper Phil Arro told her it wasn't a barracuda. It was a mystery until someone opened Wednesday's Sentinel and saw an article about Scott's find.

The fish, technically an *alepisaurus ferox*, which in Latin means "ferocious, scaleless, and lizard-like," inhabits oceans worldwide, but usually lives at depths of 4,000 to 6,000 feet.

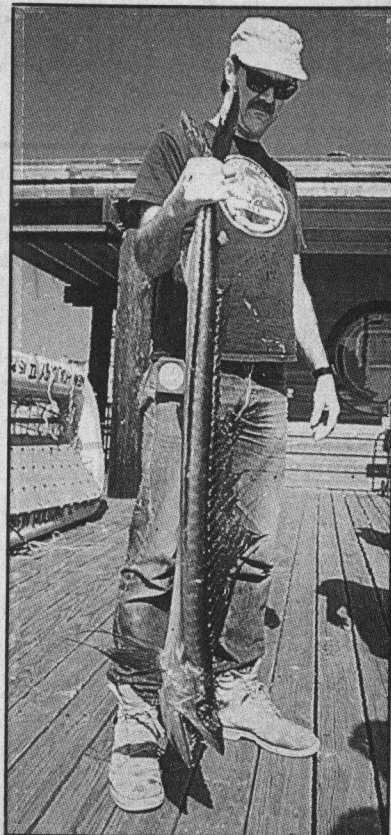
It is a primitive, top-level predator, and is a distant relative of salmon and trout, according to Lea. It is sometimes called the wolf of the sea for its voracious appetite.

Only a handful have been recovered from the Monterey Bay, including one caught in 1988 by a 12-year-old boy on the Monterey wharf. Before that, the only news report was of one caught in 1970 off Monterey.

In the past, some have thought the creatures to be sea serpents, snake mackerel, sailfish or an odd branch of barracuda.

Why they are suddenly appearing is unknown.

Lea said lancetfish are occasionally found in the surf zone, usually during the spring, when strong winds cause periods of intense up-



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Hank Scott shows off the lancetfish he caught Monday.

welling of cold water from deep in the ocean.

"We think they might come up to the surface with the cold water, and get disoriented when near the shore," Lea said.