

Jumper — Aq’alaq

AQ’ALARTUT ILUANI. – THERE ARE JUMPERS INSIDE (THE SEINE).



Photo: Jumping salmon. Courtesy of Sven Haakanson, Jr.

Jumping salmon are a conspicuous sign of summer around Kodiak. Scan the surface of the ocean in June and you will see pink salmon hurling themselves out of the water as they head for their spawning grounds. When this happens, you may hear someone shout, "Aq'alarai!" meaning "There's a jumper!" Jumping is an adaptation that helps salmon clear obstacles as they move upstream. As fish near freshwater, they begin to leap. In Alutiiq, the word for jumper, *aq'alartuq*, literally means "it fell into the water."

Different species of salmon have different jumping skills and patterns. While all Pacific salmon jump, even large kings, silvers are the most avid jumpers, often clearing the water completely. Pink salmon are also strong jumpers, although they tend to flop to one side as they land. Chum salmon are the poorest jumpers. Obstacles that will not impede other salmon can stop chum from migrating upstream.

Jumpers help Kodiak fishermen locate schools of salmon. Boat captains will drive slowly, scanning for acrobatic fish before making a set, and anglers will cast out in front of a jumper, tossing their line in the direction the fish is moving. Sometimes, jumpers will tell you when fish are present when you least expect it. Villagers know that kings will jump in winter as they feed in ocean waters near shore.