Juvenile fishes

- Lionfish were introduced by hobbyists to local waters. The invasive Lionfish became established in Atlantic US and Bermuda and spread throughout the Caribbean Sea.
- Invasions take advantage of an overfished sea. Over-harvest of predators that may eat lionfish, or co-occur with lionfish for prey, may have set the stage for proliferation.
- Lionfish are formidable. Their venomous spines and unique appearance may deter potential predators and make them unrecognizable as prey.
- Lionfish reproduce quickly. Lionfish are able to breed year-round, as frequently as every 4 days, and mature at a young age.
- Lionfish may out-compete native predators. Native species, such as snappers and groupers, may not be able to compete with lionfish for food and habitat.
- Lionfish can decimate reefs. With their voracious appetites, lionfish can reduce populations of juvenile and adult corals by up to 90 percent. Indirectly affect corals by overconsumption of grazing parrotfishes, which normally limit algae growth over corals.

The red lionfish is an invasive species native to the Indo-Pacific Ocean. Their human-caused introduction and subsequent population increase are now causing negative impacts on marine ecosystems in the southeastern seaboard of the U.S. and the Caribbean Sea. Lionfish are efficient predators invading a variety of natural and artificial habitats, competing with native predator fish and consuming smaller fishes, including the young of large species. A similar species, the devil firefish, Pterois miles, has also been observed in the Atlantic.

Portrait of an Invasion

Lionfish are effective predators. Their techniques include ambushing prey, cooperative hunting, and "swimming" with their food like pastoralists. Lionfish can consume substantial numbers of small fish and crustaceans at one feeding, reducing small fish populations by up to 90 percent.

Affected Areas

Observations of red lionfish have been recorded on coral patch reefs and deep reefs (up to 1000 feet deep or 305 meters), wrecks, mangroves, seawalls, docks, and estuaries ranging from the northeastern U.S. and Bermuda to the western Gulf of Mexico and throughout the Caribbean Sea.

What Do Lionfish Eat?

Lionfish are indiscriminate predators that will consume many prey small enough to fit in their mouth, including the young of important fish species such as grouper and snapper and ecologically important species such as parrotfishes. Lionfish may impact fishery populations which may impact local economies.

The Venomous Spines

Lionfish have two grooves on each spine. These grooves are filled with venom-producing tissue. After the spine punctures the skin, the venom glands release a jet of venom that travels up the grooves into the wound. First aid for stings:
- Take a pain reliever and soak the wound in hot water.
- Consult a physician as soon as possible.

How to Help

- Never release aquarium fish into the wild.
- Report lionfish sightings to your local or national marine regulatory agency.
- Participate in Lionfish tournaments to reduce local lionfish populations.
- Eat more lionfish. Their white, flaky meat is delicious.
- Wear thick gloves when handling to prevent injury. Venomous spines can be removed by carefully cutting with shears, making it easier to handle the fish safely.