



Lionfish Fact Sheet



Image courtesy of Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences

Basic Biology

Latin name: *Pterois volitans* (pronounced Tare-oh-ease vol-eh-tawns)

Range: Native to the South Pacific and Indian Oceans. It is a non-native, invasive species in the Caribbean and Atlantic, and in the U.S. It is common from the Florida Keys through North Carolina with isolated sightings as far north as Long Island, NY and as far west as Louisiana.

Habitat: Tropical reefs; typically in 80-260 feet of water, though shallower in warmer waters.

Diet: Hunts small fish, shrimp, and crabs at night, using its widespread pectoral fins to ambush and trap prey in a corner, then swallow it whole.

Age and growth: Normal size of 6-12 inches with a maximum length 18 inches. Reproductive maturity occurs within 2 years and maximum age is 10 years.

Sustainability

- Lionfish has become one of the Atlantic and Caribbean's most problematic invasive species. No one knows exactly how and where the first lionfish were introduced, but six were accidentally released in Biscayne Bay, Florida, when a beachside home aquarium broke during Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Further releases of pet lionfish have very likely contributed to the population that is spreading throughout the South Atlantic region.
- Lionfish have few predators in their native range, and predators in the Atlantic are unfamiliar with lionfish as a prey species and may be deterred by lionfish's venomous spines. Meanwhile, lionfish themselves are voracious predators and will eat nearly anything including juveniles of commercially important species like spiny lobster, snapper and grouper, some of which are struggling to rebuild to sustainable levels. A lionfish can consume items $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ times their own size and its stomach can expand 30 times in volume.
- In addition lionfish reproduce rapidly and their young can float great distances on ocean currents. One female can produce 2 million eggs in one year.

Info for Chefs

- The meat is mild and flaky, appearing similar to snapper, with a slightly meatier consistency.
- Take caution when cleaning lionfish as the dorsal, anal and pelvic spines are venomous. All spines should be cut away with kitchen shears and discarded. If stung, immediately treat wounds with hot water for 30 minutes, then seek medical attention.
- Lionfish is available from David Johnson, Traditional Fisheries: <http://traditionalfisheries.com>; or Gary Nichols, Nichols Seafood (FL): 305-393-1415.

Info for Servers

- Many people believe that lionfish is poisonous, this is not true – the spines are venomous (can inject a toxin into your body) but the meat is not poisonous or dangerous to consume.
- Encourage your guests to eat lionfish – creating a market for lionfish will help preserve our native ecosystems by reducing the population of this invasive species.

Sources: Fishbase – www.fishbase.org; NOAA's Eat Lionfish Campaign; National Ocean Service – <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/stories/lionfish/factsheet.html>; NOAA's Coral Reef Information System - <http://coris.noaa.gov/exchanges/lionfish/>