Sheath

**Portrait of an Invasion**

- Lionfish were introduced by humans into local waters. The invasive lionfish quickly became established in Atlantic ecosystems.
- Invaders take advantage of an overfished sea. Over-harvest of large predators that may eat lionfish, or compete 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 compete with lionfish for food and habitat.
- Lionfish can decimate reefs. With their voracious appetite, lionfish can reduce populations of juvenile and small fish on coral reefs by up to 90 percent. Lionfish may indirectly affect corals by over-consuming grazing parrotfishes, which normally prevent algae from growing over corals.

**Life Cycle**

- Eggs, 15,000-30,000 per spawning event
  - Every 1-2 weeks the female releases two mucous-encapsulated egg masses that are fertilized by the male.
- Larval stage, 20-40 days
  - Approximately 36 hours after the eggs hatch into larvae, which are dispersed by ocean currents.
- Juvenile, up to 10 months
  - Juveniles spend most of their time in one small area before expanding their range.
- Reproductive adult, 1 year
  - Although lionfish in their native range can live to 15 years, little is known about the lifespans of Atlantic invaders.

**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 painless red tide that works 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.

- **Growth Sheath**
  - 11-13
- **Ridge**
  - 2

- **Venomous Spines**
- **Non-Venomous Rays**

**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. As with many other reef fish species, ciguatera may be present in lionfish tissue. Avoid eating lionfish caught in areas with high concentrations of ciguatera.
- 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.

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**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, seaways and 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 any prey small enough to fit in their mouth, including the young of important fishery species such as grouper and snapper and ecologically important species such as parrotfishes. Lionfish may impact of fishery populations which may impact local economies.

- Small crabs
- Lobsters
- Shrimps
- Gobies
- Wrasses
- Juvenile fishes

**Red Lionfish**

*Pterois volitans*

The red lionfish is an invasive species native to the Indo-Pacific Ocean and Red Sea. 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.