

LIONEFISH



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Lionfish

The lionfish is a predatory species of fish native to the Indo-Pacific. They vary in size and color and have a pattern similar to a zebra. Currently there are 12 species of lionfish. Lionfish have spread and overpopulate areas along the East Coast of the United States especially around Florida, as well as the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. They have quickly become an Invasive species posing a huge threat to reefs and native fish species. Lionfish compete with other native predatory fish which leads to overall ecological degradation of the reef because there are less fish and shrimp to keep algae levels stable. Lionfish have the ability to reproduce at a staggeringly fast rate. Females release two gelatinous mass filled with about 15,000 eggs each. They can repeat this process every four days, explaining the huge population outburst.



HIPPCO impacts on Lionfish

Habitat Destruction: In nonnative areas lionfish are destroying their own habitat. They will eat just about anything that can fit into their mouth. They eat native fish that do not see the lionfish as a threat. Lionfish also prey on fish like “grazers” and “cleaners” who keep algae levels at a healthy level which allows sufficient oxygen to reach the coral.

Invasive Species: Currently Lionfish are not threatened by invasive species, in fact it’s quite the opposite. Lionfish are an invasive species when outside of their native Indo-Pacific waters, whose numbers are growing uncontrollably having devastating effects on various species.

Pollution: Pollution has little effect on lionfish due to their large numbers.

Population: It is estimated that in some areas lionfish have reached populations of over 1000 per acre.

Climate Change: Climate Change is having little to no effect on lionfish populations due to their location.

Overharvesting: From the perspective of a lionfish, overharvesting is having devastating effects because humans are trying to hunt lionfish to extinction. Fortunately for the lionfish it isn’t working out too well because of their ability to rapidly reproduce.

Interesting Facts

- Lionfish are NOT POISONOUS. Contrary to popular belief, Lionfish are not poisonous rather they are venomous. Venomous animals deliver their toxins with an external feature like a stinger or spines. Poisonous animals deliver their toxins only when they are ingested by another animal. The lionfish have venomous dorsal, pelvic, and anal spines.

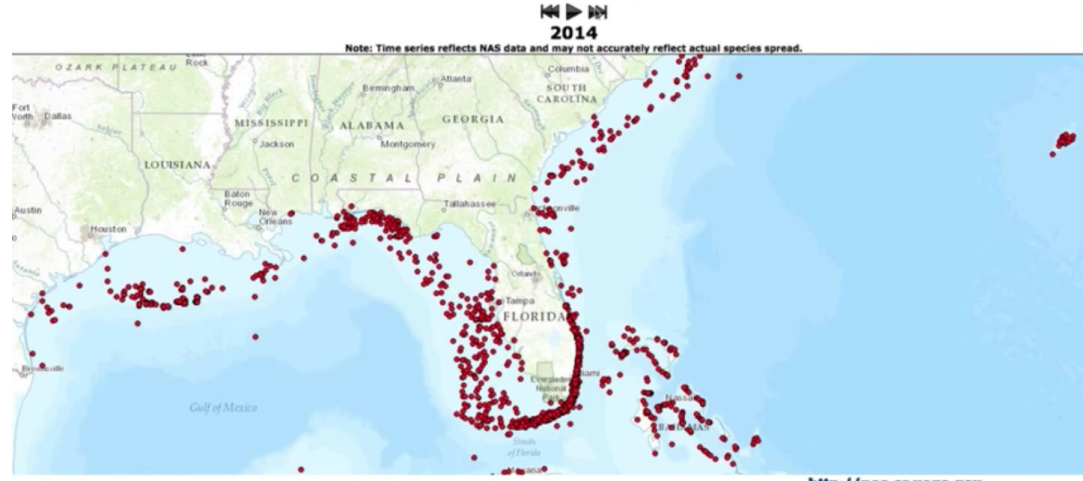
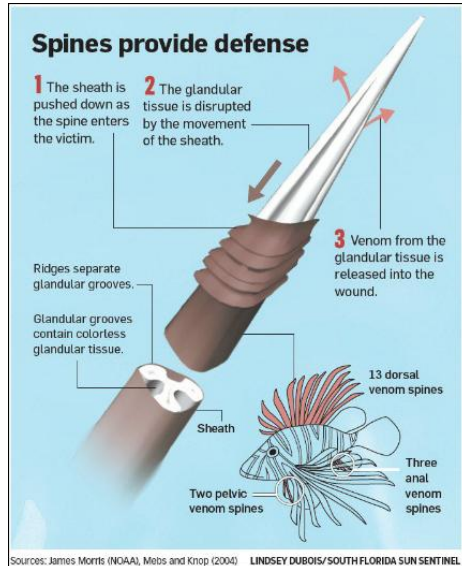
- Lionfish are edible. Because lionfish are not poisonous they are harmless when eaten, as long as you cut off the venomous spines. Lionfish meat is very delicious as well!



Interesting Facts

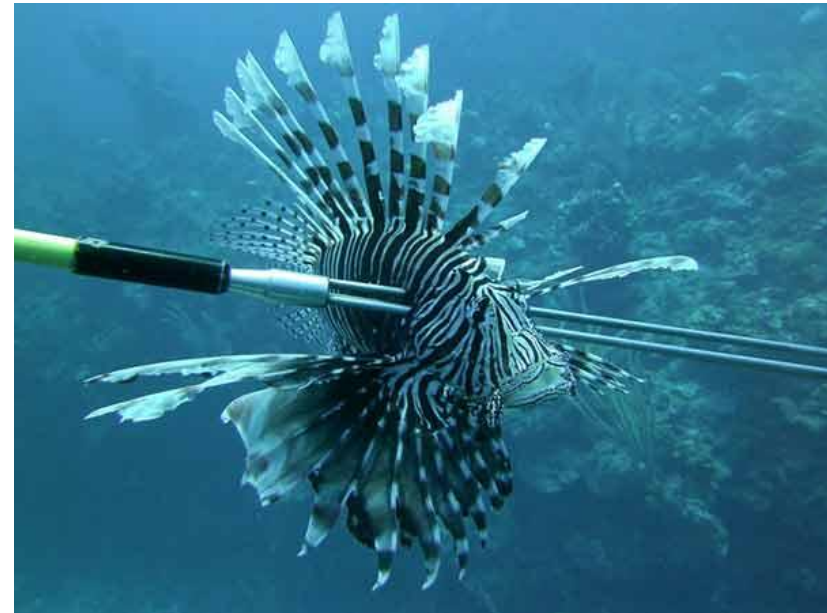
- If you get stung by lionfish “It won’t kill you, but it’ll make you wish you were dead” -Mike Ryan (Diving instructor in Key Largo)

- Lionfish were first introduced on the beaches of Florida after people released their pet lionfish. Their numbers have increased to uncontrollable levels.



Lionfish Hunting

Due to the massive destruction created by lionfish there is no recreational or commercial bag limit on lionfish. Unregulated hunting is encouraged with competitions for the largest, smallest, and most amount of lionfish.



Lionfish PSA Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRNMjEYwW3g>

The Lionfish Project

<https://thelionfishproject.com/2013/07/20/top-5-myths-about-lionfish/>

Sources

<http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2013/07/19/top-5-myths-about-lionfish/>

<https://coastalscience.noaa.gov/research/pollution/invasive/lionfish>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRNMjEYwW3g>

<http://lionfish.co/why-are-lionfish-a-problem/>