

Invasive Species **Lionfish**



A **Lionfish** is a venomous marine fish, originally from the Indo-Pacific region of the world. The lionfish is also known as the **Turkey Fish, Dragon Fish, Scorpion or Fire Fish**.

The species vary in size and coloration, and grow to about 28 to 38 cm (11-15 in.) in length. The lionfish, however, is more famous for their showy dorsal fins that are used to corral smaller fish before being gobbled up in one swoop.

How did it get into Caribbean waters?

It has been purported that the lionfish was introduced into the warmer coral regions of the Eastern Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea during the 1990s. The lionfish escaped from a storm-ravaged aquarium in southern Florida during the passage of Hurricane Andrew, and has since spawned to a considerable population size. The marine animals have been spotted all around the island coast of Jamaica.

What does this mean for the marine fisheries industry?

The growing number of lionfish is causing concern for environmentalist locally. This is especially emphatic as the lionfish has very few natural predators, and is known to be a voracious eater – eating 20 small fish in under 30 minutes. These traits of the lionfish make it an invasive species, with potential detrimental impacts, on the already depleting marine resources of Jamaica. Its diet not only includes fish, but crustaceans such as lobsters, which are the second largest fisheries export in Jamaica. The impact is expected to be felt more heavily along reefs where the primary prey of the lionfish inhabits.

How can you help to eradicate the species?

Eradication of the species is going to be a difficult task, as the lionfish is adaptable to almost all types of marine habitat.

Fishermen and other seafarers are being asked to capture lionfish on sight. Yet, care must be taken to avoid contact with the venomous spines when confronting the lionfish. The venom is not fatal to humans, but causes considerable pain and discomfort. If punctured by the spines, soak the afflicted area in hot water immediately, and then pursue medical attention.

Can you benefit from this new species in Jamaican waters?

In spite of the devastation the lionfish poses to our marine fisheries, fisher folk who capture these menaces may find additional benefits from their effort. If caught alive, the lionfish has value for marine aquarium displays and fetch good prices in the ornamental fish trade. These ornate fish are prized for their hardiness and resistance to tank diseases.

Furthermore, lionfish is edible. The fish can weigh 1.2 kg (2.6 lbs) and is said to be flavourful. According to Dr. Karl Aiken, senior lecturer in the Department of Life Sciences at the University of the West Indies, proper removal of the spine and muscles under the base of the dorsal fins, plus cooking the lionfish at high temperatures for 5-10 minutes will destroy any toxins from the meat. Dr. Aiken, however, stresses that the fish should be fried and not steamed.



REPORT SIGHTINGS/CAPTURE OF LION FISH

Persons who have seen or captured the lionfish are being asked to record where and when it was seen, how it was caught, as well as the size of the fish. The University of the West Indies, in collaboration with non-governmental agencies, will be conducting a research project on the Lionfish and this information will be beneficial in devising a management system for this invasive species.

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