

Invasive species

Red Lionfish

Scientific name:

Pterois volitans
(Linnaeus, 1758)

Habitat: Sand, coral, and live bottom substrates from about 10 to 55 m in depth (some sources indicate a greater maximum depth)

Origin: Indo-Pacific

Suspected pathway of introduction: Aquarium trade and human release.



Photo credit: Peggy Sloan, North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher

Description and similar species:

Lionfish are members of the Scorpaenidae family (Scorpionfishes). Therefore, they share some characteristics with other members of this family, such as a large head and long, extravagant fins that contain venomous spines. Their body is typically white or cream with vertical red to reddish-brown stripes. They normally

have large tentacles over their eyes and the membranes of their fins (particularly the dorsal, caudal, and anal fins) are often spotted. The red lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) is very similar and closely related to another member of its genus, the devil firefish (*Pterois miles*).

The red lionfish and devil firefish are largely separated by differences in number of fin spines or rays and also coloration.



Photo credit: Peggy Sloan, North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher

Facts and potential impact: While the red lionfish is utilized as a food fish in some areas of its native range, in the U.S. it is most commonly known as a valuable aquarium fish. The first documented introduction of red lionfish on the east coast came when Hurricane Andrew swept across Florida in 1992. The hurricane destroyed a large marine aquarium and released six lionfish into the water. These fish were seen alive nearby several days later. Since then, several lionfish have been captured or seen along the east coast, some as far north as New York. Adult red lionfish have no known predators and hunt small fish, shrimp, and crabs. The juvenile stage of this fish swims continuously in open water, which may account for its spread along the coast. As of September 2007, red lionfish have been documented and photographed at Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary off the Georgia coast.

Selected References:

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Schofield, Pamela J. and Pam L. Fuller. 2007. *Pterois volitans/miles*. USGS Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database, Gainesville, FL. Retrieved 8/3/07. <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/FactSheet.asp?speciesID=963>



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