

Taming the Lionfish

*Eat'um to Beat'um...
the new green choice
seafood.*



Project Objectives

To minimize the effect invasive lionfish have on local marine fauna and flora by aggressive culling initiatives and education.

Photos courtesy of Chris Flook and Ned DeLoach

Summary

The first confirmed report of **Lionfish** (*Pterois volitans*) in Bermuda's waters was in the fall of 2000, since then the numbers have increased dramatically. Larval recruits settling from the Caribbean continue to seed Bermuda along with the now established local population. Stomach contents of many of the landed fish show an alarming trend. Lionfish appear to eat as much as they can, whenever they can. Every fish examined to date has had very fatty liver, a classic over feeding issue. The Bahamas have recorded as much as 90% of the native fish species are gone where lionfish have established themselves in certain areas.

The first attempt at managing the damage caused by these aggressive feeders was a culling program that utilized private and commercial divers, under a special permit, to remove lionfish from sensitive areas such as known nursery areas, dive sites and marine protected areas. Bermuda was the first country to implement such a program to tackle Lionfish and has been a model for other Caribbean countries.

As the numbers of Lionfish are steadily increasing a new opportunity has revealed itself. Seeing this species as a "green choice" commercial food fish is the lemonade from lemons. *Eat'um to Beat'um* has been the campaign slogan. As a result lionfish has been on the menu in restaurants and cook books more and more frequently. Many chefs admit it is their new favorite choice.

Statistics on stomach contents, genetic diversity, reproductive activity, and population densities are being collected to create solutions to proactively address this new predator. Early testing of meat samples and livers show lionfish are relatively low in heavy metals and high in omega-3 fatty acids, an ideal choice for consumption.

Beware. Lionfish have a painful venom in their spines! If stung immerse injury in hot, not scalding water, and seek medical attention. The first 13 dorsal spines, first 2 pelvic fin spines and first 3 anal fin spines carry the venom and should be removed carefully before processing. Thorough cooking of fish will ensure deactivation of any trace venom.



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