

## ALERT BULLETIN:

The presence of the invasive species **LIONFISH** (*Pterois volitans*) has been reported in South Caribbean Eco-region waters

**Characteristics:** It is a relatively large marine species, can reach 15 inches and weighing 2,6 lbs. Presents red, brown and white vertical lines throughout his body, and has 13 dorsal spines loaded with a potent poison, 3 anal elongated and separated spines, and 10 - 11 soft dorsal rays and 6-7 anal rays. Pectoral fin-shaped fan. They have small fleshy tentacles above the eyes and below the mouth.



Lionfish is crepuscular and nocturnal species they live in tropical coastal banks algae, coral reefs and coastal lagoons and is very popular among aquarium enthusiasts, one of the 10 most valuable imported species in U.S.

**Background:** Lionfish is native to the tropical Pacific and Indian Ocean and has few natural enemies to help control it in the Atlantic Ocean. It is believed that the first lionfish were introduced into marine waters off Florida in the early 1990s from local aquariums or fish hobbyists. They have since spread across much of the Caribbean Sea and north along the United States coast as far as Rhode Island

**Threats:** (to Ecosystem) In studies on controlled plots, the Oregon State University scientists determined that lionfish reduced young juvenile fish populations by 79 percent in only a five-week period. Many species were affected, including cardinal fish, parrotfish, damselfish and many others

The Lionfish voracity, added to the natural enemies absence and their long poisonous spines for predators protection, represent a serious threat to marine biodiversity and economic activities based on tourism and fishing

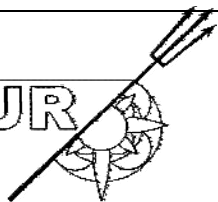
Threats to human health: All the Lionfish spines are poisonous and their bite is extremely painful. Symptoms can include swelling, redness, bleeding, nausea, numbness, joint pain, anxiety, headache, confusion, dizziness, paralysis or seizures. The more common injuries in humans are in hand, and has reported severe damage when handling recently killed specimens

### Caribbean reports:

Florida Coast to Rhode Island (1990)

Northern Caribbean including Cuba and Dominican Republic (1992)

Archipelago of San Andres and Providencia (January 2009)



## How to combat this threat?

Until now not known an efficient way to eradicate the Lionfish but we can try to keep its population at low levels through a coordinated and intensive capture. While it is an edible animal, the difficulty in managing their poisonous spines and the unknown meat makes its fishermen and the public are not prepared to consume.

Capture: Although it is a slow swimmer, their attack movements are very fast (see videos in You Tube) should therefore be taken with great care when using gloves and hand nets, another capture method may be the spear guns

## WHAT TO DO?

**REPORT:** If you or someone in your organization notes on this species, we recommend that you report immediately to environmental authorities in your country or locality, indicating date, place, time and approximate number of animals observed. You can also notify any direction from the email list (below).

### PLEASE SHARE THIS INFORMATION!

Scientist and environmental authorities in Caribbean countries are on alert trying to devise strategies to prevent and combat the Lionfish threat. We should contribute to this effort to protect marine biodiversity, and economic activities like tourism and fishing in our Eco-region

- Fundación Caribe Sur: [caribesur@gmail.com](mailto:caribesur@gmail.com) (Venezuela)
- Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute Network: [GCFINET@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU](mailto:GCFINET@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU) (Caribbean)
- Kalli De Meyer [kdm@telbonet.an](mailto:kdm@telbonet.an) (Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance)
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