

UNDERWATER INVADERS

Lionfish in the Gulf of Mexico

Red lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) are originally from the tropical waters of the Indo-Pacific. Lionfish were initially brought to the U.S. for display in aquariums. Scientists believe they were released into the waters off South Florida around 1985!



Since then, lionfish have spread all the way from Rhode Island to Texas and throughout the Caribbean Sea! Lionfish cause problems in ecosystems where they do not naturally exist, so they are considered “invasive” in these places.

Young lionfish grow more than a millimeter a day and start laying eggs at about a year old. They can produce up to two million eggs each year! Lionfish also have sharp, venomous spines, protecting them from predators. Since lionfish grow quickly, have lots of offspring, and have few natural predators, they have been able to spread quickly over long distances.



Lionfish are predators that eat other fishes, like native snappers and groupers. This can throw the ecosystem out of balance.



One way you can combat invasive lionfish is by eating them! Once you remove their spines, lionfish are delicious. You can fish for lionfish on your own or participate in tournaments called “derbies.” Derbies are especially helpful since many fish are caught and removed at one time.

