

FACTSHEET PARROTFISH



SPECIES

90+ globally

SIZE

30-120 cm, (1-4 ft)

HABITAT

Coral reefs
3-25 m, (10-80 ft)

TAXONOMY

Scientific Family: Scaridae

LIFE SPAN

6-8 years

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Tropical and subtropical regions around the world



DESCRIPTION

Iconic, brightly colored reef fish with fused teeth that resemble a parrot's beak. Change colors and patterns throughout life stages.



BEHAVIOR

Day: both territorial and found in schools.

Night: sleep alone in a mucus bubble secreted for protection from predators.



REPRODUCTION

Year-round. Form groups and release eggs and sperm into the water simultaneously (broadcast spawning). Mostly born female and change into males as they grow (sequential hermaphrodites). Fishing mainly larger parrotfish can result in a skewed population with too few males.



DIET

Spend ~90% of the day eating algae off coral reefs. They ingest limestone particles and hard calcareous algae, then poop sand! One parrotfish can produce up to 320 kg (700 lb) of sand per year.



PREDATORS

Humans, sharks, groupers, and moray eels.



MAIN THREATS

- Overfishing (greatest threat)
- Bycatch
- Loss of habitat (mostly human induced)

SPECIES IMPORTANCE

ECOLOGICAL VALUE

Parrotfish are critical for maintaining sandy beaches and healthy coral reefs. Loss of parrotfish has been a major driver of reef decline worldwide. Without parrotfish, algae can smother reefs and kill coral. The healthiest Caribbean reefs have high populations of parrotfish.

SOCIOECONOMIC VALUE

- + **Fisheries:** vital for maintaining healthy coral reef ecosystems
- + **Tourism:** revenue from marine parks, diving, and healthy reefs
- + **Shoreline Protection:** aid in prevention of long-term erosion



SOLUTIONS

- ✓ Ban the catch of parrotfish
- ✓ Establish no-take marine reserves
- ✓ Inform coastal communities, policymakers, and fish eaters about the importance of parrotfish to reef health
- ✓ Restrict fishing gear with high catch of parrotfish (nets, fish traps, spearfishing)
- ✓ List parrotfish as a protected species
- ✓ Explore alternative livelihoods for fishers

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