The red lionfish is an invasive species native to the Indo-Pacific Ocean. Their human-caused introduction and subsequent population increase are now causing negative impacts on marine ecosystems in the southeastern seaboard of the U.S. and the Caribbean Sea. Lionfish are efficient predators invading a variety of natural and artificial habitats, competing with native predator fish and consuming smaller fishes, including the young of large species. A similar species, the devil firefish, Pterois miles, has also been introduced in the Atlantic.

Lionfish reproduce quickly. As frequently as every 4 days year-round, the female releases two egg masses that may eat lionfish or compete with lionfish for food and habitat. Lionfish are formidable. Their venomous spines and unique appearance may deter potential predators and make them unrecognizable as prey.

Lionfish may out-compete native predators. Native species, such as snappers and groupers, may not be able to compete with lionfish for food and habitat. Their appearance may deter potential predators and make them unrecognizable as prey.

Lionfish can decimate reefs. With their voracious appetites, lionfish can reduce populations of juvenile and small fish on coral reefs by up to 90 percent. Lionfish may indirectly affect corals by overconsuming grazing parrotfishes, which normally prevent algae from growing over corals.

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Lionfish are adaptable. Lionfish are able to breed year-round, as frequently as every 4 days, and mature at a young age.

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How to Help
• Never release aquarium fish into the wild.
• Report lionfish sightings to your local or national marine regulatory agency.
• Participate in lionfish tournaments to reduce local lionfish populations.
• Eat more lionfish. Their white, flaky meat is delicious.
• Wear thick gloves when handling to prevent injury. Venomous spines can be removed by carefully cutting with shears, making it easier to handle the fish safely.

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**Portrait of an Invasion**

- Lionfish were introduced by humans into local waters. The invasive lionfish have become well established in Atlantic ecosystems.
- Lionfish take advantage of an overfished sea. Over-harvest of large predators such as snappers and groupers, may not be able to compete with lionfish or consume smaller fishes, including the young of important fishery species such as parrotfishes. Lionfish may impact fishery populations, which may affect local economies.

Lionfish are effective predators. Their techniques include ambush hunting and "corralling" with their fan-like pectoral fins. Lionfish can consume substantial numbers of small fish and crustaceans in one feeding, reducing small fish populations by up to 90 percent.

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