



Pest Alert

June 2010

On the Loose: Lionfish

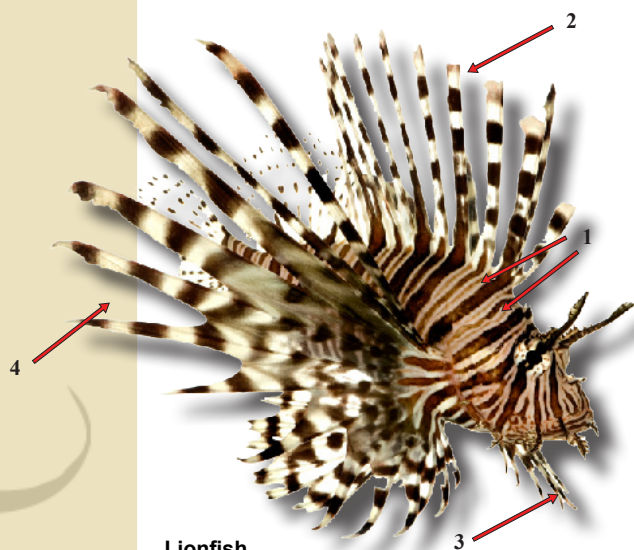
Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area

Federal, state, and local land management agencies are currently responding to a rash of recent sightings of the **lionfish** (*Pterois volitans*), a species with potential to invade south Florida's coastal waters. Since 1992, numerous individuals have been observed on local submerged reefs where they prey upon smaller native fishes and crustaceans. The local boating and diving community is being asked to help focus control efforts by reporting sightings.

Likely introduced through aquarium releases and escapees, lionfish are now found throughout the Caribbean.
Image Courtesy iStockphoto.com



How to Identify



Lionfish
Image Courtesy iStockphoto.com

Though lionfish may be found in groups as juveniles, adults are often solitary. They are easily distinguished from other species thanks to their striking coloration and design.

A series of (1) white bands alternate with red, maroon, or brown along the length of the body--extending even to the (2) tips of its fins. Lionfish have (3) fleshy tentacles near the eyes and mouth, and distinctive (4) fan-shaped pectoral fins.

Though not aggressive, lionfish are armed with a row of sharp spines along the back which are capable of injecting potent venom. Stings can be quite painful, but are not typically fatal.

How You Can Help

If you see a lionfish, document as much information as possible. Take photographs if you have a camera. Then, **quickly file a report that includes:**

- Date and time
- Location (if you have a GPS, record the coordinates)
- Depth of sighting
- Type of habitat (coral reef, seagrass, hardbottom, etc.)
- Size, number, and behavior of lionfish

Report your sighting to Biscayne National Park by phone at 786-335-3649, by email to Vanessa_McDonough@nps.gov, or online at www.IveGot1.org

If possible, avoid contact with the lionfish. If you must handle the fish, avoid touching the fins (where the venomous spines are located). If you have removed the lionfish from the water, do not release it back into the ocean.



The ECISMA is a formal partnership between federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, individuals, and various interested groups that manage invasive species and is defined by a geographic boundary.

For more information about invasive species in south Florida, upcoming FWC Nonnative Pet Amnesty Days, and tips on how you can help, visit:

EvergladesCISMA.org