

AQUANEWS

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Lionfish decimating tropical fish populations, threaten coral reefs Sent in by: Lada Simek

CORVALLIS, Ore. – The invasion of predatory lionfish in the Caribbean region poses yet another major threat there to coral reef ecosystems – a new study has found that within a short period after the entry of lionfish into an area, the survival of other reef fishes is slashed by about 80 percent.

Aside from the rapid and immediate mortality of marine life, the loss of herbivorous fish also sets the stage for seaweeds to potentially overwhelm the coral reefs and disrupt the delicate ecological balance in which they exist, according to scientists from Oregon State University.

Following on the heels of overfishing, sediment depositions, nitrate pollution in some areas, coral bleaching caused by global warming, and increasing ocean acidity caused by carbon emissions, the lionfish invasion is a serious concern, said Mark Hixon, an OSU professor of zoology and expert on coral reef ecology.

The study is the first to quantify the severity of the crisis posed by this invasive species, which 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 – a beautiful fish with dramatic coloring and large, spiny fins – 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.

"This is a new and voracious predator on these coral reefs and it's undergoing a population explosion," Hixon said. "The threats to coral reefs all over the world were already extreme, and they now have to deal with this alien predator in the Atlantic. These fish eat many other species and they seem to eat constantly." Findings of the new research will be published soon in *Marine Ecology Progress Series*. The lead author is Mark Albins, a doctoral student working with Hixon.

In studies on controlled plots, the OSU scientists determined that lionfish reduced young juvenile fish populations by 79 percent in only a five-week period. Many species were affected, including cardinalfish, parrotfish, damselfish and others. One large lionfish was observed consuming 20 small fish in a 30 -minute period.

Lionfish are carnivores that can eat other fish up to two-thirds their own length, while they are protected from other predators by long, poisonous spines. In the Pacific Ocean, Hixon said, other fish have learned to avoid them and they also have more natural predators, particularly large groupers. In the Atlantic Ocean, native fish have never seen them before and have no recognition of danger.

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AQUANEWS

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION
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Is Your Gear Safe with Nitrox?

At what oxygen content is ignition possible?

While Nitrox rapidly continues to gain popularity in the U.S. and abroad, there's a simmering debate within the industry about the maintenance of Nitrox compressors and scuba equipment. The problem is that at some increased level of oxygen in Nitrox, standard compressors and regulators can become flammable. So, the industry requires an "oxygen clean protocol," which specifies components and lubricants that are not flammable and are therefore safe. Yet, some experts believe that the oxygen level currently recommended for cleaning may be too liberal to be safe. Traditional American compressors and scuba gear are set up for compressed air, which contains tiny amounts of condensed hydrocarbons. The slurry visible in the condensation traps of standard oil-lubricated compressors shows how much oil exists in the compression chambers and thus the output. Only proper filtration removes this oil from the breathing gas. The Compressed Gas Association, a trade organization that develops standards for compressed gas practices, has a safe standard for scuba air (called "Grade-E"): no more than five Milligrams of hydrocarbons per cubic meter. A greater percentage of oxygen increases the risk of oxidation in compressors, scuba tanks and regulators. Oxidation can result in fires or even explosions. Rapid pressurization, such as when a tank is being filled or when a cylinder valve rapidly pressurizes a regulator's first stage, heats the gas. As a result, fires have occurred in fill stations and Scuba gear. Bill High, president of Professional Scuba Inspectors, recounted the case of a San Diego diver whose titanium Atomic regulator caught fire while he was breathing a decompression mix of 78.4 percent oxygen on the beach. This is why it is very important to have your equipment oxygen cleaned and know your fill station when using Nitrox at any percentage.

Rockland Aquanauts Organization Inc.
Mission Statement:

To provide, promote, and advance environmental protection, care, and voluntary clean-up of waterways by any and all lawful means; to promote the importance and care in every manner possible by environmental awareness and otherwise; to purchase, print, publish, and circulate literature to promote the importance and care of the waterways and the work of the Corporation. To perform all acts the Corporation may deem appropriate or advisable in such operation; to establish, provide, and voluntary clean-up waterways, to encourage, support and subsidize the cleaning and protection from pollution.

Lionfish

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There, about the only thing that will eat lionfish is another lionfish – they are not only aggressive carnivores, but also cannibals.

"In the Caribbean, few local predators eat lionfish, so there appears to be no natural controls on them," Hixon said. "And we've observed that they feed in a way that no Atlantic Ocean fish has ever encountered. Native fish literally don't know what hit them."

When attacking another fish, Hixon said, the lionfish will use its large, fan-like fins to herd smaller fish into a corner and then swallow them in a rapid strike. Because of their natural defense mechanisms they are afraid of almost no other marine life. And the poison released by their sharp spines can cause extremely painful stings to humans – even leading to fatalities for some people with heart problems or allergic reactions.

"These are pretty scary fish, and they aren't timid," Hixon said. "They will swim right up to a diver in their feeding posture, looking like they're ready to eat. That can be a little spooky."

Their rapid reproduction potential, Hixon said, must now be understood in context with their ability to seriously depopulate coral reef ecosystems of other fish. Parrotfishes and other herbivores prevent seaweeds from smothering corals. A major, invasive predator such as lionfish could disrupt the entire system.

Options to manage the lionfish threat are limited, Hixon said. They can be collected individually, which may be of localized value, but that approach offers no broad solution. Recovery or introduction of effective predators might help. Groupers, a fish that has been known to eat lionfish in the Pacific Ocean, have been heavily over-fished in the tropical Atlantic Ocean, Hixon said.

"We have to figure out something to do about this invasion before it causes a major crisis," Hixon said. "We basically had to abandon some studies we had under way in the Atlantic on population dynamics of coral reef fish, because the lionfish had moved in and were eating everything."

80% loss of small reef fish, not enough grouper to eat THEM and a possible overgrowth of coral by algae! Looks bad, but I have a solution: ADVERTISE IN JAPAN THAT THEY MAKE DELICIOUS SUSHI- THEY WILL BE GONE IN MONTHS!

Lada Simek



The Last Word on Dive Tipping

rules for American divers maybe even I can observe
from the [July, 2008 issue of Undercurrent](#)

When it comes to tipping on a dive trip, you can tip anyone you want any amount you want. It's your business. But if you have some regard for money, the purpose of the tip, the country and its culture you're visiting, as well as your fellow divers who come from other countries, you might try to be thoughtful rather than reckless. Of course, hardly anyone at a dive resort or on a liveaboard will turn down a tip, but it's not necessarily appropriate to pass out money as you would business cards at a convention.

After reading the hundreds of responses we received from our readers to our e-mail question about tipping, it's clear that most divers don't know what is "right." Most Americans feel guilty if they don't tip big, while just about everyone else in the world tips more selectively, tips less, and often never. Not because they're cheap, but because they believe people should properly perform the job they are being paid for and that it's not up to the customer to reward them a second time. They often view American tippers as foolish and crass.

So if you're an American diver and want some guidelines, other than what travel agents and resort and liveaboard owners urge us to do (15 percent, maybe 20 percent, of the total bill, which means hundreds of dollars that may never end up where you intend), you should pick those who did something for you tip them individually. If you jump into the tipping pool, you have no control over the results.

Ben's American Rules

I believe tips are for the so-called working stiff - - minimum wage earners, people not earning a living wage, people in deadend jobs, and people who are neither managers, professionals nor owners, and who don't get a share of the profit.

Tips are for:

- * People who serve you, like waiters and bartenders, but not your butcher or the lady selling you jewelry.
- * People who clean up after you, like cabin attendants and maids, but not your dry cleaner or dental hygienist.
- * People who deliver things to you, like bellhops and pizza drivers, but not the FedEx guy or the furniture delivery man.
- * People who transport you, like a dinghy driver or a cab driver, but not an Amtrak engineer or a liveaboard captain.
- * People who point you in the right direction or help you out, like guides who point out fish or a concierge who scores you World Series tickets, but not your librarian or travel agent.
- * People who touch you, like masseuses and barbers, but not nurses or your tailor.
- * People who save your life, like the boatman who tracked you down a mile from your liveaboard, but not the dive guide who forgot to count you.
- * And you might consider tips for the folks who work when you sleep, like those raking the leaves on the beach, scrubbing the kitchen floors, or washing the urine out of your wetsuit.

Of course, most Aussies and Brits I know are scoffing at my laundry list, but remember guys, these are American rules.

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Because tips are not for owners, managers or professionals, it means that it's not for chefs, trip leaders, scuba instructors who teach you (did you tip your underpaid high school gym teacher?), airplane pilots or bus drivers. Nor are they for people who grab your suitcase without asking, or guides who don't point out fish, say rude things to you, talk behind the back of others, are sexist, racist and just plain stupid . . . and, of course, for anyone who suggests a tip, no matter how subtly. A tip is not an entitlement.

If you boil all this down, the American traveling diver should consider tipping dive guides, tank attendants, chase boat drivers, and servers and cleaners. A tip pot or tipping request that includes the photo pro, the chef, the engineer, the tour director or the boat captain, to name a few, is excessive and ought to be ignored in favor of individual tips.

The rule works very well on a liveaboard, where you've got plenty of time to tip people individually. It's a little tricky, however, because the chef might also be the one who makes your bed, so he might deserve a small tip for that, but not if he fails to wash his hands afterward.

At a resort, where for each day you have a different guide, dinghy captain and guy washing out your wetsuit, it gets tough, especially if you haven't learned their names. But at many venues, giving a ten spot to the guide and asking him to spread it around is like asking a tot to share her Christmas candy – only after she gets her fill. You might feel less guilty, but you may just be empowering a bag man.

When in Rome...or Raja Ampat

No matter where you go, most everyone you tip will be a local (though some guides might be American or Aussie). If you follow my approach, you should then fashion a tip based on local standards, which may not be easy to figure out, but give it a shot.

For example, with a quick Google search I learned the average wage in Bangkok is less than US\$30 a day, but that's weighted by high-income earners. When you go lower down the income levels, it's more like \$10-\$15 for office workers and even less for laborers. Minimum wage is around \$6 per day.

In Indonesia, where the minimum wage is \$3 a day, local crew excluding dive guides generally make \$50 to \$150 a month. Local dive guides range between \$100 to \$700 a month. Expat dive guides/cruise directors, usually around \$800 to \$1,500 a month, some more. In Papua New Guinea, laborers may make \$100 to \$200 a month and dive guides more.

So in countries like this, I think a tip of \$5 a day would be fitting, even generous. If the person was serving 12 divers on a liveaboard, he'd be getting twice his wage in tips (he can be paid less and still be paid fairly if he is fed). If he were my private guide, I'd give him \$10, maybe \$15. If someone in a hotel carries your bag, a five-spot is not the appropriate tip; two-bits is closer to it.

If there are five people on the liveaboard who meet my tipping criteria, then I should be shelling out \$250 for a ten-day trip. Divers who think 15 percent of a \$3000 trip would be shelling out \$450.

The Caribbean, of course has a higher standard of living and pay scale. In the Cayman Islands, depending on what island and what resort, monthly wages range from as low as US\$1,000 to nearly \$2,000. Tipping \$10 to \$15 per day total for those involved – you pick 'em – seems fair. If you're tipping everyone all at once on a \$1,500 bill for

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the week, then \$150 to \$200 would make sense – if you're an American. If you're Canadian or a Brit? Well, at least buy your dive guide a pint or two.

Do You Know Where Your Money Is Going?

Of course, the operators, who rely on tips to ensure their staff is paid enough to stay on the job, won't be happy with what they will see as a parsimonious approach from Americans with deep pockets – after all, we Americans are subsidizing all those other divers who don't tip. But let us remind them of cruise ships. These days, tipping is becoming standardized. It's \$10 a day per person for everyone but the bartender, who is tipped separately. And you, with the deep pockets, should keep in mind that if you're traveling with Europeans, Aussies and Kiwis, you might be the only one tipping. And they'll consider you daft.

Regardless of what leaders tell you about the fairness of their community pots, you have no control over how it's disbursed so you can't be sure of the distribution formula. While the money often gets to the hardworking soul who just cleans cabins or tends to the engine, it may not. So carry a dozen plain envelopes, lots of small bills, and pass them out to the people whom you want the tips to reach.

And tip for the service you received, not so you'll be remembered when you return. That may make sense if you go to the same bar or restaurant every Friday night, but if you're going back to Captain Don's or Beqa Lagoon Resort once a year, chances are most everyone you dealt with has moved on, and if not, you'd be remembered only if you dropped a hundred-dollar bill everywhere you went. Sure, you "felt like family," but a hundred people a week leave feeling like family.

Finally, of course, you can tip anyone any amount you care to. It's your money and you can give it away. However, there's something gauche about an American tossing money around, and while you might put a moment of joy in the hands of the recipient, a little prudence will benefit the greater good. And if you still feel like a cheap-skate, give it to a school or library. At the airport, drop it into one of those buckets for a local charity. Instead of tipping the photo pro or the tour director who makes living wages, you can feed five families for a week.

I asked several people to read and comment on this before it went to print. Here are two views I want to share.

John Bantin, Technical Editor of Diver in the UK, says this: "Yours is an interesting yet uniquely American perspective on tipping. I believe it is best to do what is considered normal in any situation. In America, people who serve seem to live on the tips they get but in the EU, people must be paid a proper wage. In some countries like Papua New Guinea, not only is tipping not normal but it is actively discouraged. In Thailand, everyone hustles for more. When you tip a liveaboard boat crew, often it is the people you never see who deserve the most, such as the engineer who stayed up all night to mend the compressor or fix the sanitation flush, so individual tipping is often unfair. And giving 10 percent of the cost of your holiday is a ludicrous idea that makes other people think Americans have got more money than sense."

Ken Knezick, American owner of Island Dreams Travel in Austin, had this comment: "Personally, if I 'overtip' and it helps to change someone's life, then I am happy to be able to do so. I don't think we are required to perpetuate disparities of income and lifestyle. I have been graced with much good fortune, be it due to luck of birthplace, education, opportunity, and a body and brain that work. Sharing that wealth is part of what makes me who I am. On the other hand, I have had a resort manager tell me, 'Don't spoil the wogs.' What a pitiful attitude."

- - Ben Davison

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE

Rockland Aquanauts Organization
2009 Dues

I guess it is that time of the year again, Membership Dues are due. Last year all our members received much more than they gave out to the Organization. As usual you will be receiving a tax donation for the first \$25.00. All members who attended the Annual Dinner not only received money off their own dinner but they also received money off their guests dinner. Everyone whom attended also received prizes, some worth many times the cost of their Dues. Don't forget the Annual Picnic as well as all the BBQ lunch's after the Lake Dives.

So please send in your \$42 dues early to;

Rockland Aquanauts Organization
c/o
Paul Galeazzi Jr.
4 Greensward Drive.
Valley Cottage New York 10989

BBQ Help Needed

We have BBQs after every Hessian Lake dive, but next year, we don't want the chef tasks to fall on the same people all the time, so we are asking for your help. If you plan on coming to the Hessian Lake dives, please consider offering to set up, cook, or break down the BBQ gear.

Setting up might mean you set up before diving, get out of the water first, or forego diving that day. **Cooking** means you cook for everyone who shows up, not just yourself & your friends. **Breaking down the BBQ gear** means you stay until everyone has eaten and the grill is cool enough to put into your car to store until the next dive.

You don't have to be a Board Member to help. Everyone can pitch in. Any expenses, like buying food, are reimbursable. So please look at the dive dates and let us know when you can help out.

Thank you

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Lion Fish, Is Your Gear Nitrox Safe?, Last Word on Tipping, EmbroidMe, Membership Dues

****There Will be NO February Meeting ****