



Critter of the Week: Balloonfish



<http://www.dashto.com/>

Scientific Name: *Diodon holocanthus*

Description: Light gray to tan body color with large, darker brown blotches on sides and back, with small black spots in between. Brown bar above & below each eye. Covered with spines

Habitat: Circumtropical, including western Atlantic from Florida & Bahamas, south to Brazil. Eastern Atlantic and western central & eastern Pacific.

1. Flexible anal, dorsal, and pectoral fins are used to help the balloonfish navigate through corals at a slow speed.
2. Can grow to 20" (50 cm) in length, but typically grows to lengths of 8-14" (20-35 cm).
3. Teeth are fused together into a single strong beak-like mouth that is capable of cracking the shells of snails, sea urchins, and hermit crabs.
4. Balloonfish are nocturnal predators and generally hide in crevices during the day.
5. Spawning occurs after the males slowly push the females to the water's surface.
6. Balloonfish larvae less than 10 days old are covered with a thin shell; after this time, the shell is lost and the spines begin to develop.
7. Can be distinguished from porcupinefish by the lack of spots on fins.
8. Juveniles are often pelagic (live in the open ocean) and are associated with floating mats of sargassum.
9. Juvenile balloonfish are eaten by many pelagic predators, including tuna and mahi-mahi.
10. Adult balloonfish are eaten by sharks.