

New species of snapper discovered in Brazil

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A popular game fish mistaken by scientists for a dog snapper is actually a new species discovered among the reefs of the Abrolhos region of the South Atlantic Ocean.

The international science journal *Zootaxa* announced the discovery of *Lutjanus alexandrei*, a new snapper species that belongs to the Lutjanidae family, by researchers Rodrigo Moura of Conservation International (CI) and Kenyon Lindeman of Environmental Defense. The study published in *Zootaxa* provides a revised key for identifying all *Lutjanus* species in the western Atlantic, along with evidence that the new species completes its life cycle in different but interdependent marine habitats such as coral reefs and mangroves.

"This discovery that a large, popular fish is a species new to science shows how little we know about the oceans that surround us," Moura said. "It looks like other snapper species found in the Caribbean and eastern United States, as well as the dog snapper caught by fishermen here in Brazil, but it is a distinct species with different markings and color."

Twelve species of the family Lutjanidae, including the new discovery, are now identified in the western Atlantic Ocean. They include *Lutjanus griseus* and *Lutjanus apodus*, two species restricted to the Caribbean and eastern coast of the United States but previously believed to occur in Brazilian waters until the discovery of *Lutjanus alexandrei*.

The new species also has been mistaken for *Lutjanus jocu*, known as the

dog snapper, a popular commercial fish in Brazil. According to Moura and Lindeman, the discovery shows the need for more comprehensive studies of Brazil's reef fish populations, particularly in the northeastern region that includes the Abrolhos area which contains the nation's largest concentration of coral reefs.

The new species is named for 18th century naturalist Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, whose extensive work in the Brazilian interior remains largely unknown. Moura and Lindeman spent five years observing *Lutjanus alexandrei* to analyze its characteristics and determine the distinct features.

It occurs from the state of Maranhão to the southern coast of the state of Bahia, and its habitats include coral reefs, rocky shores, coastal lagoons with brackish water, mangroves and other shallow habitats. Juveniles requiring more food and protection live in mangroves, then migrate to reef habitat and deeper areas as adults.

"Several species spend some of their lives in these different yet connected habitats," Lindeman said. "That's why it's so important to develop integrated conservation strategies that include mangroves, deep reefs and other interdependent ecosystems."

Source: Conservation International

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