

# NOAA divers capture invasive lionfish in the Virgin Islands National Park

August 6 2010

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Divers identified and killed a 15 cm long lionfish in Fish Bay along the southern coast of St. John, making this the fourth such capture and kill of the invasive fish in the Virgin Islands National Park.

The [lionfish](#) was first spotted July 15, 2010 and captured the following day within 10 meters of the original sighting. A team of divers and scientists from NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and the National Park Service were in the area collecting data aimed at evaluating the health of corals, fish and invertebrates in a ten-year long project funded by NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program. This is the first time during the annual surveys the research team has sighted a lionfish. Governments across the Caribbean are concerned by the potential environmental impact of this species, which is multiplying rapidly across the region and consuming native fish at unsustainable rates in some locations.

"Lionfish pose a huge threat to the [coral reef ecosystems](#) of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The native fish populations are essentially defenseless in the face of this threat. And once established, lionfish are very difficult to control," noted Rafe Boulon, Chief of Resource Management for the Virgin Islands National Park and the Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument.

Native to the Indo-Pacific, Lionfish were first spotted in the US [Virgin Islands](#) off the coast of St. Croix in 2008. NOAA scientists with the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science were the first to identify

their first appearance in North Carolina and have been leading research and monitoring efforts since then. They have been in close collaboration with the Reef Environmental Education Foundation, scientists from Simon Fraser University, and the US Geological Survey to undertake critical research on lionfish biology, ecology, and environmental impacts.

In addition, NOAA is studying lionfish control strategies and has launched an "Eat Lionfish" campaign, which works with chefs, fishermen, and wholesalers to promote the development of a market for these [fish](#). NOAA scientists have determined that a major fishing effort is required to reduce their numbers and mitigate their impact on reef ecosystems.

Provided by NOAA

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