



Blue Tang Surgeonfish

Acanthurus coeruleus

Range/Habitat

- Blue tang surgeonfish occurs Western Atlantic from New York and Bermuda to the Gulf of Mexico and south to Brazil, as well as in the eastern Atlantic near Ascension Island. Extremely abundant around Virgin Islands.
- Found in tropical shallow waters, coral reefs and inshore grassy or rocky habitats as deep as 131 feet (40 m).

Physical Characteristics

- Maximum length is 12 inches (31 cm).
- Tall-bodied, laterally compressed fish with a pointed snout, small scales and continuous dorsal fin. Eyes located high on the head. The mouth is small and low on the head. Close-set teeth adapted for grazing algae from the reef.
- As an adult, this tang is deep blue in color with a white or yellow spine on the caudal peduncle (base of the tail fin), a characteristic shared with other surgeon fish. Uses spine to fend off predators, defend territory and display social dominance.
- Juvenile is mostly bright yellow, sometimes displaying a blue coloring on the edges of the fins, and blue crescents above and below the pupils of the eyes. In intermediate phase color darkens to a bright blue or purplish-gray with a yellow caudal fin.

Diet/Feeding

- As adult, feeds entirely on benthic, or bottom-dwelling, algae.
- Juveniles also consume zooplankton and may act as cleaner fish.
- Serves important role on the reef in preventing fast-growing algae from overgrowing a coral bed.
- Occasionally forms large aggregations that forage in shallow reefs, grazing on algae. The group tactic overwhelms the defenses of territorial species such as damselfish, which would normally chase off individual tangs.

Reproduction

- Spawning occurs during late afternoon and evening hours. Forms spawning aggregations and travels to the surface, releasing gametes into the open water.

Conservation Status

- "Not Evaluated" on IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- May live in holes and crevices on the reef to shelter it from predators at night.
- Most distinctive coloration of all Western Atlantic surgeonfish.
- At night it may display white vertical stripes.
- At Fernando de Noronha Archipelago in the southwestern Atlantic, juveniles hold cleaning stations and pick molted skin and parasites from green turtles.
- The flesh of the blue tang may cause ciguatera poisoning if eaten.
- A popular saltwater aquarium species.





GEORGIA AQUARIUM

at Pemberton Place

Sources:

www.fishbase.org

<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/Gallery/Descript/BlueTang/BlueTang.html>

www.zipcodezoo.com/Animals/A/Acanthurus_coeruleus/

www.seaworld.org

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