



Newsletter

Remembering Bob

With great sadness we learned of the death of Bob Johannes in early September of this year. Bob was well-known for his concern over the effects of exploiting reef fish spawning aggregations for live fish, in particular, and was active and effective in bringing widespread attention to many of the problems associated with the live reef food fish trade in the Pacific Ocean. His commitment and contributions will be missed by many in the region.

News

For progress in aggregation management and conservation, this is surely the year of the Nassau grouper, *Epinephelus striatus*. And rightly so. This species was one of the first for which aggregation declines and extirpations were documented and the best known of all aggregating species. See the SCRFA website (www.scrfa.org) for a special article dedicated to this species.

Belize - In November of 2002, we heard the excellent news that the Government of Belize had signed legislation that provides for a closed season for the Nassau grouper during its spawning season in Belize, which runs from December 1st – March 31st. In addition, full, year-round protection was declared for 11 spawning sites, many of which are also spawning areas for other reef fish species. This legislation was the result of many years of hard work by a coalition of NGOs (Belize Audubon Society, Friends of Nature, Green Reef, TIDE, The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society and World Wildlife Fund) striving together with the government, fishing cooperatives, researchers and other stakeholders and shows the importance of the collaborative and consultative approach. Congratulations to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives of Belize.

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Editorial

Welcome to SCRFA's new newsletter. We aim to provide news, information and list recent publications to help you keep up-to-date with what is happening in respect of tropical reef fish spawning aggregations globally.

Newsletters will be produced several times a year and will be distributed both directly to members and on the website. We will be covering work in progress, management implementation, news of SCRFA activities and other items that will hopefully be of general interest. We warmly welcome submissions of news items, information on recently published work and any other material that is relevant to the membership. Please submit to: scrfa@hkucc.hku.hk, yjsadovy@hkucc.hku.hk or request a fax number or mailing address.

Remember that SCRFA can also help with campaigns for which you might need membership input or support, or as a means to reach a wider public through our website.

Yvonne Sadovy



Cayman Islands - New legislation is to be introduced in January 2003 to protect Nassau grouper at designated spawning areas. The plan is to allow no fishing in alternate years and to permit a bag limit of 12 fish per boat per day in those intervening years when fishing is to be permitted.

Moreover, from November to March inclusive, no fish traps are allowed within 1 nautical mile of any boundary of any designated grouper spawning area and no Nassau under 30.5 cm may be taken at any time. Currently there are 3 legally designated traditional grouper spawning areas and 5 more have been proposed. The Cayman Islands has a commendable history of Nassau grouper aggregation protection. This started in 1985, when the government issued a licence that allowed only residents to enter the 3 traditional Nassau grouper spawning areas and prohibited the use of traps, spear guns, explosives or nets. The areas were legally demarcated in 1998 along with marine park legislation and the current law has built on this history of protection. Congratulations to the Department of the Environment.

Gulf of Mexico, United States – Several spawning aggregation sites of the gag grouper, *Mycteroperca microlepis*, are protected in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico, within the Madison Swanson Fishery Reserve and Steamboat Lumps Fishery Reserve, each roughly 100 square nautical miles. They have a 4-year sunset (duration) and so come up for re-authorization (or dismissal) next year. Presentations have to be made to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (National Marine Fisheries Service) in May of 2003. Other aggregations of this species are still heavily fished with no protection other than size limits. Please support continued protection of the gag grouper if you can.

Bahamas – Currently (as of end of November, 2002) being considered in the Bahamas is a closed season for the Nassau grouper. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries is evidently meeting with fishermen and with Fisheries officials to discuss the closure and determine the most appropriate dates. If you can support the closure in the Bahamas, please write to: Hon. V. Alfred Gray, M.P. Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Local Government, P.O. Box N-3028, Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas. The Nassau grouper is listed as endangered on the IUCN

(World Conservation Union) Red list of threatened species and the protection of its aggregations in the Bahamas would represent a significant measure for population recovery.

United States Virgin Islands - A partial closure (for either the site or the spawning season) of a yellowfin grouper, *Mycteroperca venenosa*, spawning aggregation proposed by the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council and NMFS will probably be discussed in the third quarter of 2003. ReefGuardian International is working to have one spawning aggregation fully protected from fishing for the entire spawning season.

Pohnpei – A spawning aggregation for three grouper species, brown-marbled grouper, *Epinephelus fuscoguttatus*, camouflage grouper, *E. polphekadion*, & squaretail coralgrouper *Plectropomus areolatus* is closed to fishing for three months of the year. No market sales of these species are allowed in two of the three spawning months and a proposal to extend the sales ban has been submitted.

Great Barrier Reef – In an earlier communication, SCRFA membership was advised of the opportunity to comment (by December 16th) on the Queensland Government's Draft Fisheries (Coral Reef Fin Fish) Management Plan 2002. The SCRFA Board submitted comments in support of temporal closures of spawning aggregation sites. The comments were based partly on the lack of evidence that aggregation declines already noted had not been due to aggregation fishing, and partly on the basis of the observed impacts of commercially fishing spawning aggregations elsewhere. I shall advise of the outcome when it is announced.

Live reef food fish trade update – There are many reports from Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the western and central Pacific of the exploitation of reef fish spawning aggregations for live fishes and much concern over the intensity and impacts of such exploitation. Among measures being considered or developed by several NGOs under the

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation is a set of guidelines that represent a code of good practice to be adopted voluntarily by participants in the live reef food fish trade. One recommended guideline being discussed is not to use spawning aggregations as a source for live food fish.

Miscellany – Yet another new fishing technique!? Just when you think you have heard it all, something else turns up which demonstrates that we need to be very careful if control of fishing gear is adopted as the route of choice to protect or manage a particular spawning aggregation. It turns out that at least one unicornfish (Family: Acanthuridae) likes sandwiches, or at least bread. In the northern sector of the South China Sea the species (unconfirmed) is commonly taken by fish trap. However, during the spawning season, aggregated fish can be captured in large quantities using bread to attract the fish to the surface and a scoop net is then used to catch the fish. Several hundred kg can be caught in this way in one day. Whoever heard of banning bread and scoop nets from aggregation fishing? You have now.

SCRFA activities

So what has SCRFA been up to recently? Our main projects since I started in July have been the website (www.scrfa.org), developing the Board, a Methods Manual and the Global Database.

We continue to update the website and develop the Society (see website for details). The global database is having a front-end added that will be accessible through the website and enable both data entry on-line and the facility to search information already entered (not including actual aggregation site locations, of course). This will take a few months to develop.

In the meantime, we have prepared a preliminary summary of data that we have already checked and inputted to the database. Please check the SCRFA website for this report.

Shortly to be added to the website is the Methods Manual being spearheaded by Pat Colin. This has now grown to over 100 pages and includes methods, tips, photos and available technologies for working on

spawning aggregations. It is written with a very broad readership in mind. Major sections cover both the practical aspects of monitoring and identifying, documenting and discovering spawning aggregations and their fisheries, scientific methodology for monitoring and filming aggregations, techniques for examining eggs, larvae and adults and movements to and from aggregations. There is also a section on conservation and management and plenty of useful reference material.

2002 Publications and Articles

Journals

Harris, P. J., Wyanski, D. M., White, D. B., & Moore, J. L. 2002. Age, growth and reproduction of scamp, *Mycteroperca phenax*, in the southwestern North Atlantic, 1979-1997. *Bulletin of Marine Science* 70(1): 113-132.

Pelaprat, C. 2002. Observations on the spawning behaviour of the dusky grouper, *Epinephelus marginatus* (Lowe, 1834) in the north of Corsica (France). *Marine Life* 9(1): 59-65.

Rhodes, K. L., & Sadovy, Y. 2002. Temporal and spatial trends in spawning aggregations of camouflage grouper, *Epinephelus polyphekadion*, in Pohnpei, Micronesia. *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 63(1): 27-39.

Sale, P. F. 2002. *Coral Reef Fishes: Dynamics and diversity in a complex ecosystem*. Academic Press, San Diego, pp. 549.

White D.B., Wyanski D.M., Eleby B.M. & Lilyestrom, C.G. 2002. Tiger grouper (*Mycteroperca tigris*): Profile of a spawning aggregation. *Bulletin of Marine Science* 70(1): 233-240.

Others

Perrine, Doug. 2002. Article and photos on humphead wrasses (*Cheilinus undulatus*) and bumphead parrotfish (*Bolbometopon muricatum*) at Layang Layang and Sipadan. November 2002 issue of DIVE Magazine (UK).

Samoilys, M. A. 2002. Spawning aggregation closures for the live reef fish fishery in the Solomon Is. Live Reef Fish Bulletin. Secretariat of the Pacific Community 10: 30.

2002 - Two responses to the 2001 article on spawning aggregations on the Great Barrier Reef: *The live reef fish trade on Australia's Great Barrier Reef: changes to historical fishing practices by Bruce Mapstone and coworkers et al.* Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Live Reef Fish Bulletins 9 and 10 [SPC bulletins can be found at: <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/News/LRF/lrf.htm>]

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