



## Puffers & Boxes: A Hard Act to Swallow

*Fishinar 4/11/2013, Jonathan Lavan – Instructor*

Puffer/Boxfish 101- While two very different types of fish both Puffers and Boxfish have evolved to have the same strategy for survival from predation. Over flight they have chosen to be very difficult to swallow although in very different ways. Puffers have the unique ability to draw in water to greatly inflate their bodies to many times its normal size. Boxfish are in two common groups: Cowfish (with head spines) and Trunkfish (without head spines). Rather than a conventional fish skeleton (like Puffers) they have a triangular bony box of armor. There are openings for the gills and only the eyes, lips and fins protrude out from under this unconventional but effective skeleton. Two sharp spines in front of anal fins are common in all Caribbean Boxfish except the Smooth Trunkfish. While both groups of fish are fairly ineffective swimmers they can put on sudden and surprising burst of speed when necessary using their tails, especially Boxfish.

- **Sharpnose Pufferfish**- White to pale yellowish tail has dark borders. Common to occasional throughout the range.
- **Goldface Toby** – Tail pale yellow to yellow with blue markings, no dark borders. Prefer deeper waters below 80ft. Uncommon to rare Florida, Gulf of Mexico; also north to North Carolina.
- **Bandtail Pufferfish** – Two dark bands on tail. Row of dark blotches from head to tail. Common to occasional throughout range and as far north as Massachusetts, south to Brazil, Bermuda and eastern Atlantic.
- **Checkered Pufferfish** – Polygon-shaped patches on back and sides are large and numerous, and range from brown to olive or gray. Prefer shallow, mucky, rubble strewn inlet areas. Occasional throughout range, also Gulf of Mexico, north to Rhode Island and south to Brazil.
- **Striped Burrfish** – Spines remain erect. Irregular pattern of dark brown, more-or-less parallel stripes on back and sides. Common Florida gulf coast; occasional balance of Florida and continental coasts to Brazil, rare to absent Bahamas and Caribbean islands; also north to Maine. Other less common Burrfish: Web, Bridled, and Spotted; which is very similar to Porcupinefish.
- **Balloonfish**– Long spines on head. Small dark spots on body; no spots on fins. Iris is yellow; pupil has iridescent blue-green specks. Occasional throughout range; Gulf of Mexico, Bermuda and south to Brazil, circumtropical.
- **Porcupinefish**– Spots on tail. Small, dark spots over entire body. Can be large; up to 3 feet. Occasional throughout range; Gulf of Mexico, Bermuda and south to Brazil, circumtropical.

- **Scrawled Cowfish**- Sharp spine above each eye. Scrawled pattern of bluish markings cover body, blue line runs from snout to anal fin. Common to occasional throughout range, north to Massachusetts, Bermuda and south to Brazil.
- **Honeycomb Cowfish**- Honeycomb pattern on body. Occasional eastern Florida, Bahamas, and south to Brazil, Bermuda and north to New Jersey. Not reported Florida Gulf Coast.
- **Trunkfish**- Obvious hump on back. Does not have area of pale honeycomb marking on central midbody like Smooth Trunkfish (next). Base of tail long. Has anal spines. Also commonly called “Buffalo Trunkfish”. Occasional to uncommon throughout range; also Gulf of Mexico, north to Massachusetts, Bermuda and south to Brazil.
- **Smooth Trunkfish** – Dark body covered with white spots, area of pale honeycomb markings on central midbody. No anal spines: smooth. Juvenile: dark body with yellowish edged white spots. Common to occasional throughout range; also Gulf of Mexico, north to Massachusetts, Bermuda and south to Brazil.
- **Spotted Trunkfish** – White body covered with black spots including fins. White around mouth (not always obvious). Has anal spines. Juvenile: White body with black spots. Occasional to uncommon Florida Keys, Bahamas, Caribbean; also south to Brazil.

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