



Triggers & Files: The I.D. Tools of the Trade

Fishinar 3/21/2013, Jonathan Lavan – Instructor

Trigger/Filefish 101- Most have rhomboid/oval/diamond shaped, laterally compressed bodies, front dorsal modified into a “trigger” or “file”. Both have two to three “triggers” or “files” secondary trigger/file helps to support and keep primary trigger/file locked in place. The second spine or “trigger” spine must be depressed to release the first back into the down position. Hence the common name. The spines are kept in a special groove when not in use. They have small terminal mouths with crushing teeth for eating a wide variety of foods. Rear pectoral and anal fins are main source of locomotion. Many have greatly elongated pelvic bones creating a “dewlap” of skin. Filefish have very small scales and hence rough skin which was once used to finish wooden boats thus the original source of their common name.

- **Queen Triggerfish**- Streaming tips on rear dorsal and anal fins. Two blue stripes on face. Small lines radiate from around eyes. The caudal peduncle has a wide blue band. Active foragers, particularly partial to sea urchins. Common to occasional throughout the range.
- **Gray Triggerfish** – Blue spots and line markings on upper body and fins. Light gray to olive-gray to yellowish brown. Common Florida coast, uncommon remainder of range.
- **Ocean Triggerfish** – Black blotch at base of pectoral fin. Normally swim alone or in small groups well above the reef in open water. Common to uncommon throughout range and as far north as Massachusetts.
- **Sargassum Triggerfish** – Three dark lines on cheek. Series of dashes form thin stripes on body. White dot just forward of eye and white crescent bordering upper eye. Tend to be shy, diving into and locking into reef crevices when approached. Common to occasional throughout range.
- **Black Durgon** – Black body. White to pale blue lines along base of dorsal and anal fins. Usually in small groups up above the reef. Very common to occasional throughout range, circumtropical.
- **Scrawled Filefish** – Covered with blue to blue-green spots, irregular lines and black dots. Elongated body with long broom-like tail. Common to uncommon within range and north to Massachusetts, Bermuda and south to Brazil, circumtropical.
- **Whitespotted Filefish**– Noticeably extended belly appendage. Orange spines at base of tail. Upper body shades of gray to olive or brown, with brown to orange below. Snout whitish. Two phases: one with large whitish spots the other without. Often in pairs. Common to occasional throughout range, Bermuda and south to Brazil.

- **Orangespotted Filefish**- White spot on upper base of tail. Orangish spots cover body. Common to uncommon throughout range, north to Massachusetts, Bermuda and south to Brazil.
- **Slender Filefish**- Slender elongated head, snout and body. Usually have white reticulated pattern over body. Large dewlap usually has yellowish edge with submarginal blue line. Usually found drifting vertically among gorgonian branches. Occasional throughout range, Bermuda and north to North Carolina.
- **Planehead Filefish**- Thick, blotched body. Snout and nape profile nearly straight, at about a 45-degree angle. Uncommon Florida; also Gulf of Mexico, north to Nova Scotia, Bermuda and south to Brazil. Not reported Bahamas and Caribbean.
- **Fringed Filefish** – Base of dorsal fin has a steep hump. Thick body, and protruding but not elongated snout. Dewlap usually has large black area. Occasional throughout range, north to Nova Scotia, Bermuda and south to Argentina.
- **Pygmy Filefish** – Vague, incomplete body stripes formed by dashes and dots. Rarely over four inches in length. Often in floats of Sargassum. Uncommon throughout range, Bermuda and north to North Carolina.

Questions? Feel free to contact me at jonathan_maureen@yahoo.com

www.underpressure-spurdog.blogspot.com

www.underpressurephotographybest.blogspot.com

(also @ Underpressure Photography on facebook)