

# MORE THAN 400 LIONFISH REMOVED FROM KEYS WATERS

By **Contributed** - May 11, 2022



REEF Team members Madalyn Mussey and Lex Bryant with invasive lionfish collecting during the 2022 REEF Earth Day Lionfish Derby.  
REEF/Contributed

There are several hundred fewer invasive lionfish wreaking havoc on Florida Keys reefs thanks to the recent efforts of four local divers.

Team Forever Young, consisting of Tony Young, Jason Vogan, Jeff Tharp and Luke Rankin, collected 426 invasive lionfish while participating in the 2022 Earth Day "Locals" Lionfish Derby, hosted by Reef Environmental Education Foundation.







*The REEF team measures lionfish caught during the 2022 REEF Earth Day Lionfish Derby.*

Teams were permitted to fish in Monroe County waters from sunrise to sunset on April 23, although windy conditions prevented most teams from getting on the water this year. Team Forever Young, the only team that ventured out, brought in 426 fish, which set a record for a single-day REEF lionfish derby held in the Florida Keys. The largest lionfish of the competition measured 425 mm (16.73 inches), and the smallest was 102 mm (4.01 inches).



On April 24, the community gathered at Sharkey's Sharkbite Grill in Key Largo to see all the lionfish derby scoring action, including measuring, dissections and fileting. Attendees also learned about invasive species through hands-on demos and games, sampled fresh lionfish ceviche and beer-battered lionfish, and interacted with local conservation organizations.

REEF lionfish derbies educate the public about invasive species, gather important scientific information on lionfish populations and promote a consumer market for lionfish. This is the 13th year that REEF has hosted a lionfish derby in the Upper Keys. Prizes are awarded to teams that bring in the most, largest and smallest lionfish and cash prizes are awarded for first through third place.






*Team Forever Young brought in 426 lionfish and swept all three derby categories – most, largest, and smallest. Pictured from left are team members Jason Vogan, Tony Young, Jeff Tharp and Luke Rankin.*


Lionfish, native to the Indo-Pacific, are an invasive species in the Tropical Western Atlantic and are causing significant harm to native marine life throughout the region. Regular removals and events like derbies have been found to reduce lionfish populations significantly at the local scale and engage communities to continue supporting the effort and management. More than 60,000 lionfish have been removed from REEF-supported derbies, outreach and research programs.

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REEF will host the Florida Keys Lionfish Derby & Festival on Sept. 11 at Postcard Inn Beach Resort & Marina in Islamorada. This 13th annual event includes two full days of fishing and a public festival with lionfish scoring and tastings, educational demos, games, crafts, raffles and activity booths from environmentally-focused vendors. More information is at [www.REEF.org/derby](https://www.REEF.org/derby).

The 2022 REEF Lionfish Derby Series is made possible thanks to Ocean Reef Conservation Association, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Postcard Inn Beach Resort & Marina, Sharkey's Sharkbite Grill, Ocean Conservancy, Baker's Cay Resort, ZooKeeper LLC, Forever Young Charter Company and Triad Foundation. All activities occurred within NOAA Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary under permit.



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