



The

Hometown News & Views PELICAN

Friday, August 20, 2010 - Vol. XVIII, Issue 33

POMPAÑO BEACH • DEERFIELD BEACH • LIGHTHOUSE POINT • LAUDERDALE-BY-THE-SEA
WILTON MANORS • OAKLAND PARK • HILLSBORO BEACH

NOAA wants public to “Eat Lionfish” to help reduce invasive species

By Michael d'Oliveira

PELICAN STAFF

Pompano Beach - Christine Acevedo knows a few tricks when it comes to filleting lionfish. And if NOAA, or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, has its way she'll be cooking up a lot more of them over the next few years.

Recently, NOAA launched its “Eat Lionfish” campaign, in the hopes that members of the public can help reduce the lionfish population.

With no natural predators in this part of the world, the population has surged and threatens native fish populations, coral reefs and the commercial and recreational fishing industry.

For humans, a lionfish's venomous sting causes great the diving community against this common enemy. This is a grass roots effort. They could affect everything if we don't act now,” said Attis. “These fish are dangerous. They can really cause some serious damage, depending on where it gets you.”

Acevedo knows first hand what a sting is like. She got stung while cleaning a dead lionfish. “It was a very painful. It's a burning, tingling sensation and my finger was swollen for a few hours. My whole hand for an hour or two.”

Even with the public's help, NOAA officials don't expect



The first lionfish spotted by Vone Research divers on Feb. 21 off the coast of Pompano Beach. It met the business end of a spear gun. [Photo courtesy of Scott Cravens]

the invasive predator to be wiped out entirely. The goal now is to get the population to a manageable number and keep it from growing.

NOAA is partnering with local groups to help train members of the public on how to safely catch or kill lionfish. But Lana still cautions people with no training to report lion-

fish. “You have to take out 27 percent of adults per month every year” to get the population under control.

Originally from the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean, lionfish were introduced into the Atlantic Ocean in the 1980s and 90s by aquarium owners who didn't want their beautiful, but deadly pets

anymore.

“They started in Florida and spread all through the Caribbean and up to North Carolina,” said Lana. “They eat 56 different fish. In some locations they have cleared out those fish up to 90 percent and they compete with snapper and grouper for food supplies.” According to

NOAA, the lionfish population in North Carolina alone is up 700 percent between 2004 and 2008.

Lana says new research on South Florida and other areas is coming out soon. “In some locations we're talking 200 lionfish per acre. That's a lot. And it's looking like there's a lot more than that.” As for how they taste, “Delicious,” says Acevedo. “The taste of the meat is comparable to hogfish or grouper. It's sort of sweet.”

To report lionfish sightings, call Paula Whitfield, NOAA Beaufort Laboratory, at 252-728-8746 or email at Paula. Whitfield@noaa.gov. Be prepared to provide coordinates of where the lionfish was found and at what depth. If possible, photographs or video should accompany the email. To treat lionfish stings, NOAA recommends immersing the wound in hot water - 100 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit for 20 minutes. Do not burn the skin and seek medical attention as soon as possible.

It is recommended that calls be made as soon as possible to the Aquatic Toxins Hotline at the Florida Poison Information Center in Miami at 1-888-232-8635, where medical experts will advise victims immediately. The Hotline is available 24/7. For more on Vone Research, visit www.lionfishkillers.org or call 954-249-9195.