

A Field Guide to the Reef Fish of Tarou Point

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## **Abstract**

Tarou Point, located near the middle of Dominica's west coast, is a peninsular projection of volcanic rock that is surrounded by coral assemblages which are home to a large diversity of fish. The goal of this project was to identify as many fish species living on and around Tarou Point, including reef dwellers and open water species. A total of four dives was made and 72 species confirmed.

## **Introduction**

This is a field guide to the different kind of fish species found at Tarou Point, otherwise known as Rodney's Rock. This guide was designed to facilitate further identification and research and contains descriptions as well as habitat information to help find and identify marine fishes. The common name as well as the scientific name, general body shape, coloration, and size of each fish observed are also listed (Humann 1999). Some species have distinctly different color patterns in adult, juvenile and intermediate phases, and these phases are described; and the phases we observed are indicated.

A previous study by Don Lucas was made in the spring of 2001. He identified 74 species over a twelve-week period in the vicinity of Tarou Point.

## **Methods and Materials**

On four separate occasions we traveled to Tarou Point to observe the fish in their natural habitat. We parked as close as possible and then walked along the rocky beach or snorkeled to Rodney's Rock. Methods of observation included snorkeling along the surface as well as diving down to observe species in crevices and caves along the coral reef. Many of the snorkelers used wetsuits. This aided in keeping us warm, as well as avoiding sunburn. However, they also hindered us. Wearing a wetsuit made us more buoyant, making it harder to dive down to deeper depths. The use of a weight belt helped to eliminate this problem. After observing a specific species of fish we would write down the common name or description on our underwater tablet. We used underwater fish guides written by Paul Humann to help identify species. Photographs were also taken when possible. After each dive, the group would compare observations and compile a list of species, using Humann (1999) for assistance with identification and scientific names. This was repeated on each of our four trips.

## **Results**

Underwater pictures were taken, however most were blurry and unidentifiable. We believe this occurred for a couple of reasons. First of all, when on the surface of the water it is hard to stay immobile long enough to take a picture. The same thing happens when diving down to take a picture. Without scuba

gear, one cannot stay buoyant and motionless without moving the camera thus producing a blurry picture.

The species observed are listed by family for easier reference.

### **Family Acanthuridae** (Surgeonfish)

All species in this family have a sharp spine located at the base of the tail used for defense. All have thin, oval bodies with crescent tail and long dorsal and anal fins.

Blue Tang (adult and juvenile) *Acanthurus coeruleus*

*Description:* Blue overall with infrequent color change to a lighter coloration with dark blue vertical bars. Intermediate phase: dark blue body and yellow tail.

Juvenile phase: bright yellow overall with blue lines on dorsal and anal fins. Size: 5 to 10 inches, max 15 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found foraging on algae on shallow reef walls.

Doctorfish *Acanthurus chirurgus*

*Description:* Light bluish gray with dark blue vertical lines. Can change color to a black phase. Size: 6 to 12 inches, max 14 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found foraging on algae on shallow reef walls.

Ocean Surgeonfish *Acanthurus bahianus*

*Description:* Green dorsal coloration fading to blue ventral coloration with white band around the tail. May change to dark bluish gray coloration with no white band. Size: 6 to 12 inches, max 15 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found foraging on algae on shallow reef walls.

### **Family Apogonidae** (Cardinalfish)

Flamefish *Apogon maculatus*

*Description:* Orange in color with a black spot under the dorsal fin. Size: 2 to 3½ inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found hiding on a shallow reef.

### **Family Aulostomidae** (Trumpetfish)

Trumpetfish *Aulostomus maculatus*

*Description:* Long slender body with trumpet-like mouth. Most common colors seen were yellow, tan, and reddish-brown. Can have many other color variations. Size: 1½ to 2½ feet, max 3 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found suspended vertically, head-down. Also seen hiding between rocks and in caves.

### **Family Balistidae** (Filefish)

Orangespotted Filefish *Cantherhines pullus*

*Description:* Thin, oval body with a yellow rounded tail. Has black body coloration with fading yellow horizontal lines. Also has an elongated dorsal spine that can be raised and lowered when threatened. Size: 4 to 7 inches, max 8½ inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found around the reef and on the open sea floor.

### **Family Belonidae (Needlefish)**

Flat Needlefish *Ablenes hians*

*Description:* Long, slender body with short scissor-like beak and a silver body with dark vertical bars. Size: 1½ to 3 feet, max 3½ feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found at the surface of the water near schools of silversides.

Houndfish *Tylosurus crocodilus*

*Description:* Long, slender body with silver coloration. Scissor-like beak that is slightly longer than flat needlefish. Size: 2 to 3½ feet, max 5 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found at the surface of the water near schools of silversides.

### **Family Blenniidae (Blenny)**

Redlip Blenny *Ophioblennius atlanticus*

*Description:* Black, blunt head fading to dark brown body with orange pectoral fins and red lips. Size: 2½ to 4½ inches, max 5 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found hugging the reef wall.

### **Family Bothidae (Flounder)**

Channel Flounder *Syacium micrurum*

*Description:* Flat, round body with dorsal and anal fins beginning at the head and ending at the tail. They lie on their right side with their eyes on the left side. They change color to blend in with their surroundings. Size: 4 to 9 inches, max 12 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on sandy bottoms and sometimes covers itself with sand.

Peacock Flounder *Bothus lunatus*

*Description:* Flat, round body with dorsal and anal fins beginning at the head and ending at the tail. They lie on their right side with their eyes on the left side. Has blue rings on body and can change color to blend in with their surroundings. Size: 6 to 15 inches, max 18 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on sandy bottoms and reef rocks.

### **Family Carangidae (Jack)**

Blue Runner *Caranx crysos*

*Description:* Streamlined, silver body with a hint of yellow on the tail. Tail has a deep fork used for open water swimming. Size: 1 to 2 feet, max 2½ feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found in the open water near the reef wall.

### **Family Chaetodontidae (Butterflyfish)**

Banded Butterflyfish *Chaetodon striatus*

*Description:* Oval, thin body with a protruding mouth. Jux to position of dorsal, anal, and tail fins give the fish its circular shape. Body is white with three vertical black stripes, one going through the eye. Size: 3 to 5 inches, max 6 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on reef wall or traveling along bottom to other reef walls.

### **Family Dasyatidae (Stingray)**

Southern Stingray *Dasyatis americana*

*Description:* Flat, cartilaginous body that is diamond shaped and a long tail with a spine used for defense. Use wings to glide through the water. Grey coloration.

Size: 3 to 4 feet, max 5½ feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the sandy bottom, especially on the north side of Tarou Point.

### **Family Gobiidae (Goby)**

Goldspot Goby *Gnatholepis thompsoni*

*Description:* Small, thin body that is white with gold and black spots. Has black ring around head that goes through the eyes. Uses pectoral fin to jump along reef wall. Size: 1½ to 2½ inches, max 3 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found hugging the reef wall.

### **Family Grammatidae (Basslet)**

Fairy Basslet *Grama loreto*

*Description:* Small, elongated body with purple head and yellow body. Size: 1½ to 2½ inches, max 3 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found upside down under reef overhangs.

### **Family Haemulidae (Grunt)**

French Grunt *Haemulon flavolineatum*

*Description:* Yellow body with jagged blue horizontal stripes. Size: 6 to 10 inches, max 12 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in open water on sandy bottom and under reef overhangs.

Smallmouth Grunt *Haemulon chrysargyreum*

*Description:* Yellow body with straight horizontal blue stripes. Size: 7 to 9 inches, max 10 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in open water on sandy bottom and under reef overhangs.

## **Family Holocentridae (Squirrelfish)**

Blackbar Soldierfish *Myripristis jacobus*

*Description:* Red body with black vertical bar behind gills. Size: 3½ to 5½ inches, max 8 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found upside down in caves and under reef overhangs.

Cardinal Soldierfish *Plectrypops retrospinis*

*Description:* Overall red body. Size: 3½ to 5½ inches, max 8 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in caves and under reef overhangs.

Longjaw Squirrelfish *Holocentrus marianus*

*Description:* Thin body with pointed mouth. Has a reddish body color with yellow and purple stripes. Size: 4 to 6 inches, max 7 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in caves and under reef overhangs.

Longspine Squirrelfish *Holocentrus rufus*

*Description:* Overall red with small white patches on body. Size: 5 to 10 inches, max 12½ inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in caves and under reef overhangs.

Squirrelfish *Holocentrus adscensionis*

*Description:* Red upper body that fades to silver and a white tail. Size: 6 to 12 inches, max 16 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in caves and under reef overhangs.

## **Family Labridae (Hogfish/Wrasse)**

Bluehead *Thalassoma bifasciatum* (Adult and Juvenile)

*Description:* Long, cylindrical body with a blue head, a black ring, white ring, black ring, and remaining body is green. Juvenile: Yellow dorsally and white ventrally. Size: 4 to 5 inches, max 6 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in open water and on reef wall.

Clown Wrasse *Halichoeres maculipinna* (Juvenile only)

*Description:* Gold dorsal stripe, black mid body stripe, and a white ventral stripe. Size: 3 to 5 inches, max 3½ inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on reef wall.

Hogfish *Lachnolaimus maximus*

*Description:* Triangular shaped head with a protruding mouth. Black bar runs from mouth to dorsal fin and white body coloration. Size: 1 to 2 feet, max 3 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found in the open water and along the reef wall.

Slippery Dick *Halichoeres bivittatus* (intermediate phase only)

*Description:* Greenish body with a yellow head and black vertical lines toward the end of the tail. Size: 5½ to 7 inches, max 9 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in the open water and along the reef wall.

Spanish Hogfish *Bodianus rufus*

*Description:* Purple dorsally with yellow face, ventrum, and tail. Size: 8 to 14 inches, max 2 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found in the open water and along the reef wall.

Yellowhead Wrasse *Halichoeres garnoti* (juvenile only)

*Description:* Overall yellow with a horizontal blue stripe down the middle of the body. Size: 5 to 6 inches, max 8 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in the open water and along the reef wall.

### **Family Lutjanidae (Snapper)**

Lane Snapper *Lutjanus synagris*

*Description:* Silver-blue body with yellow horizontal lines. Dorsal fin continuous and anal fin rounded. Also has a black spot on dorsal surface near posterior end. Size: 8 to 12 inches, max 15 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in open water near sandy bottom.

Yellowtail Snapper *Ocyurus chrysurus*

*Description:* Silver body with yellow horizontal stripe down center of body and a yellow, forked tail. Size: 1 to 2 feet, max 2½ feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found in open water.

### **Family Malacanthidae (Tilefish)**

Sand Tilefish *Malacanthus plumieri*

*Description:* Long, slender body with a dark gray dorsally and white ventrally with a tint of yellow on the tail. Size: 1 to 1½ feet, max 2 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the sandy bottom.

### **Family Mullidae (Goatfish)**

Spotted Goatfish *Pseudupeneus maculatus*

*Description:* White body with three black spots on dorsal surface. Also has two barbels on either side of the mouth. Size: 5 to 8 inches, max 11 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the sandy bottom.

Yellow Goatfish *Mulloidichthys martinicus*

*Description:* Silver body with yellow horizontal stripe down middle of body and a yellow tail. Size: 6 to 12 inches, max 15½ inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the sandy bottom.

### **Family Muraenidae (Moray)**

Chain Moray *Echidna catenata*

*Description:* Black, snake-like body with irregular yellow lines. Size: 1 to 1½ feet, max 2½ feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found hiding in holes in the reef.

Green Moray *Gymnothorax funebris*

*Description:* Green-yellow, snake-like body. Size: 3 to 5 feet, max 8 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found hiding in holes in the reef.

Spotted Moray *Gymnothorax moringa*

*Description:* White, snake-like body with small black spots. Size: 1½ to 3 feet, max 4 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found hiding in holes in the reef.

### **Family Ophichthidae (Snake eels)**

Goldspotted Eel *Myrichthys ocellatus*

*Description:* Tan, snake-like body with gold spots surrounded by black rings. Also has two barbells coming from nostril area. Size: 1 to 2½ feet, max 3½ feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found in open water.

### **Family Ostraciidae (Boxfish)**

Smooth Trunkfish *Lactophrys triqueter*

*Description:* Short, round, black body with white spots. Size: 6 to 10 inches, max 12 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found near the reef wall.

Spotted Trunkfish *Lactophrys bicaudalis*

*Description:* Short, round, white body with black spots. Size: 6 to 12 inches, max 16 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found near the reef wall.

### **Family Pempheridae (Sweeper)**

Glassy Sweeper *Pempheris schomburgki*

*Description:* Oval body with thin, forked tail and a shiny copper coloration. Size: 3 to 5 inches, max 6 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in caves and reef overhangs.

### **Family Pomacanthidae (Angelfish)**

Cherubfish *Centropyge argi*



*Description:* Oval body with a yellow face and dark blue body. Has a continuous dorsal fin. Size: 1½ to 2½ inches, max 3 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

French Angelfish *Pomacanthus paru* (juvenile only)

*Description:* Triangular body shape with yellow and black stripes. Has a blue tip on the pelvic and anal fins. Size: 1 to 5 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found near holes in the reef wall.

Gray Angelfish *Pomacanthus arcuatus* (juvenile only)

*Description:* Triangular body shape with yellow and black stripes. Has a purple tip on the pelvic and anal fins. Size: 2 to 5 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found near holes in the reef wall.

Queen Angelfish *Holacanthus ciliaris*

*Description:* Disk shaped body with anal and dorsal fins extending beyond the tail. Has a blue, yellow, and green face with a blue body and small yellow spots. Also has a yellow tail. Size: 8 to 14 inches, max 18 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

Rock Beauty *Holacanthus tricolor* (adult and juvenile)

*Description:* Black, disk shaped body with a yellow face and tail. Juvenile: yellow with dark spot surrounded by a blue ring. Size: 5 to 8 inches, max 12 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

### **Family Pomacentridae (Damsel fish)**

Beaugregory *Stegastes leucostictus* (juvenile only)

*Description:* Yellow ventrum coloration and a blue dorsum coloration with sparse blue spots on body. Size: 2½ to 3½ inches, max 4 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

Bicolor Damsel fish *Stegastes partitus*

*Description:* Black anterior and white posterior coloration. Size: 2 to 3½ inches, max 4 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

Blue Chromis *Chromis cyanea*

*Description:* Light blue body with a black stripe on dorsal side and a deeply forked tail. Size: 3 to 4 inches, max 5 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in schools in open water above the reef. Also seen with brown chromis.

Brown Chromis *Chromis multilineata*

*Description:* Light brown dorsally and white ventrally with yellow fringe on dorsal fin. Also has a white spot where the dorsal fin and tail meet. The tail is deeply forked. Size: 3½ to 5 inches, max 6½ inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in schools in open water above the reef. Also seen with blue chromis.

Dusky Damselfish *Stegastes fuscus* (adult and juvenile)

*Description:* Oval shaped body with dark brown to black coloration. Also has a faded green patch above the eyes. Dorsal and anal fins do not extend past the base of the tail. Juvenile: oval, blue body with orange coloration beginning between the eyes to halfway down the dorsal side. Also has a black spot with a blue ring at the end of the orange coloration. Size: 3 to 5 inches, max 6 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found near the reef wall.

Longfin Damselfish *Stegastes diencaeus*

*Description:* Oval shaped body with dark brown to black coloration. Dorsal and anal fins extend well beyond the base of the tail. Size: 3 to 4 inches, max 5 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found near the reef wall.

Night Sergeant *Abudefduf taurus*

*Description:* White, oval shaped body with vertical fading black bars. Dorsal fin extends to the base of the yellow tinted tail. The upper lip also extends beyond the lower lip. Size: 5 to 8 inches, max 10 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found hiding under the reef overhangs.

Sergeant Major *Abudefduf saxatilis*

*Description:* White, oval shaped body with five vertical fading black bars. Also has yellow coloration on dorsal fading to light gray on the ventral. Size: 4 to 6 inches, 7 inches max.

*Habitat:* Can be found in most areas.

Yellowtail Damselfish *Microspathodon chrysurus* (adult, intermediate, and juvenile)

*Description:* Dark blue to black oval shaped body with a yellow tail and blue dots on the dorsal surface and fin. Intermediate Phase: dark blue, oval shaped body with luminescent light blue spots on dorsal half. These spots extend from the head to the yellow tail. Juvenile: Same as IP, but with clear tail. Size: 4 to 6½ inches, max 7½ inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on reef wall.

## **Family Scaridae (Parrotfish)**

Princess Parrotfish *Scarus taeniopterus* (initial phase and terminal phase)

*Description:* Elongated, oval body shape with dark blue coloration fading to light blue. Also has a yellow horizontal stripe beginning behind the gill cover and

fading to the tail. Initial Phase: elongated, oval body shape with a brown dorsal stripe, a pinkish stripe, a brown stripe, a yellow stripe, ending with a cream belly. The dorsal and anal fins are greenish yellow in coloration. Size: 8 to 10 inches, max 13 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

Stoplight Parrotfish *Sparisoma viride* (male and female)

*Description:* Male: Elongated, oval body with a crescent caudal fin. The body is blue-green coloration with the operculum outlined in pink. The caudal fin has an alternating blue-green and yellow coloration. Size: 1 to 1½ feet, max 2 feet.

Female: Elongated, oval body with a crescent caudal fin. The head and most of the body have a honeycomb black and white pattern with a red ventral surface. The caudal fin has a black base, white vertical stripe, and red tip. Size: 5 to 10 inches, max 12 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

Striped Parrotfish *Scarus croicensis* (adult and juvenile)

*Description:* Elongated, oval body with dark blue dorsal stripe. Rest of body is alternating yellow, green, and purple. Has a blunt shaped head and the lower jaw is yellow. Juvenile: elongated, oval shaped body with alternating black and white stripes and a white ventral surface. The tip of the nose is yellow. Size: 8 to 9 inches, max 10 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

### **Family Sciaenidae (Drum)**

Highhat *Equetus acuminatus*

*Description:* Oval, brown body with white horizontal stripes. Front dorsal fin is tall and back dorsal fin is short and extends to the base of the tail. Size: 5 to 8 inches, max 9 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found under reef overhangs.

Spotted Drum *Equetus punctatus*

*Description:* Elongated, dark brown body with white vertical lines on the head and white horizontal lines on the body. Also has a tall front dorsal fin with spots on the back dorsal fin and caudal fin. Size: 6 to 9 inches, max 11 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found under reef overhangs.

### **Family Scorpaenidae (Scorpionfish)**

Spotted Scorpionfish *Scorpaena plumieri*

*Description:* Odd-shaped bottom dweller with large pectoral fins. Color variation to match habitat and three vertical stripes on caudal fin. Size: 7 to 14 inches, max 18 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

## **Family Serranidae (Grouper/Seabass)**

Black Grouper *Mycteroperca bonaci*

*Description:* Elongated, oval body black in coloration. Has a large mouth and blunt tail. Size: 1½ to 3 feet, max 4 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found under reef overhangs.

Harlequin Bass *Serranus tigrinus*

*Description:* Elongated, gray body with black vertical stripes and a horizontal yellow stripe down the middle of the body. Also has black spots on the blunt shaped tail. Size: 2½ to 3½ inches, max 4 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in coral rubble.

Yellowmouth Grouper *Mycteroperca interstitialis* (juvenile only)

*Description:* Elongated body with black dorsal surface and white ventral surface. Dorsal fin has a light patch of yellow. Size: 1 to 2 feet, max 2½ feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found under reef overhang.

## **Subfamily Grammistinae**

Greater Soapfish *Rypticus saponaceus*

*Description:* Pale body color with brown splotches and gray fins. Size: 5 to 9 inches, max 13 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found under reef overhangs.

## **Family Sphyraenidae (Barracuda)**

Great Barracuda *Sphyraena barracuda*

*Description:* Long, slender silver body with a few black spots and two dorsal fins. Size: 1½ to 3 feet, max 6 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found in open water.

## **Family Syngnathidae (Pipefish)**

Shortfin Pipefish *Cosmocampus elucens*

*Description:* Long, slender body with a long, slender snout. Color variation depending on habitat. Size: 3½ to 5½ inches, max 6 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in reef crevices and holes.

## **Family Synodontidae (Lizardfish)**

Sand Diver *Synodus intermedius*

*Description:* Elongated, tan body with dark splotches. Size: 4 to 14 inches, max 18 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the sandy bottom.

## **Family Tetraodontidae (Puffer/Smooth)**

### Balloonfish *Diodon holocanthus*

*Description:* Fat, round body with white, brown, and dark brown splotches. Also has spines all over body and capable of inflating. Size: 8 to 14 inches, max 20 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in reef area and under reef overhangs.

### Bandtail Puffer *Sphoeroides spengleri*

*Description:* Elongated body with brown dorsum and white ventrum. Also has brown horizontal spots on ventral. Size: 4 to 7 inches, max 12 inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found in reef openings and crevices.

### Porcupinefish *Diodon hystrix*

*Description:* Fat, round body with brown dorsum and white ventrum. Also has a large head and dark brown spots all over body. Size: 1 to 2 feet, max 3 feet.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef and in crevices.

### Sharpnose Puffer *Canthigaster rostrata*

*Description:* Oval green dorsum with a yellow mid section and blue-gray ventum. Also has intermittent blue spots. Size: 2 to 3½ inches, max 4½ inches.

*Habitat:* Can be found on the reef wall.

## **Discussion**

This field guide provides an overall view of the reef fish observed at Tarou Point. A total of 72 species was identified. However, many small reef dwellers were overlooked as well as nocturnal fish not visible during the day. Also undetected were many fish living at deep depths since snorkeling does not allow for prolonged observance of those fish.

Most of the fish at Tarou Point were small in comparison to their normal size range. This was undoubtedly due to the large amount of spear fishing that occurs in that area. We watched as a number of fish and other sea creatures were taken from the waters around Tarou Point. Large underwater traps were also observed. Both methods were indiscriminate on what species were taken. Don Lucas also noted in his report that overfishing was a problem at Tarou Point. His report also noted species that we did not observe. However, we observed species that he did not. This could be for a number of reasons. First of all, he utilized SCUBA, as well as snorkeling, in his research. This allowed him to observe species at lower depths, yet possibly missing shallow reef species. He also made a total of ten trips to Tarou Point, whereas we only made four trips.

Although the fish at Tarou Point are not large in comparison to their average size, they were still observed in large numbers. The five most abundant species seen

were the blue tang, blue chromis, sergeant major, redlip blenny, and yellowtail damselfish.

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