



MLA-003-LionFish-Key Largo-Florida

The Voracious Eaters get Eaten

Vic Ferguson

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation 281.886.7428 P.O. Box 311117 Houston Texas 77231

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by [REEF_HQ](#)

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More than sixty people (including ScubaBoard's own NetDoc and mselenaous) gathered this April at the Fish House Encore in Key Largo, Florida, for *Lionfish Food and Wine Night*, a four course dinner with paired wines meant to introduce the light, white meat and delicious flavor of lionfish. And to give lionfish a taste of their own medicine.

The invasive species, known for their voracious appetites and rapid reproduction, was prepared four different ways with a creative medley of ingredients and wine selections. Entrées included bacon-wrapped barbeque lionfish, sea salt-cured lionfish ceviche and poached lionfish. Many guests said their favorite dish was Lionfish Bermuda, a lionfish fillet encrusted with fried red onions and Japanese breadcrumbs, baked and served with a sweet and sour sauce atop baby arugula salad.

Before dining, event attendees learned about the lionfish invasion and the importance of removing lionfish from marine environments. Peter Tselikis, chef at Fish House Encore, showed the audience how to cook two popular lionfish dishes. Lad Akins, a renowned lionfish expert and Director of Special Projects at Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF), taught the audience how to fillet lionfish, avoiding the venomous spines.

"It's exciting to see such strong public and commercial interest in consuming lionfish," says Akins. "Developing a market for lionfish is a great way to provide incentive for increased removals. Even non-divers can make a real impact, by ordering the fish at their local restaurants, helping to decrease lionfish populations and minimize their impacts."

Lionfish, which have now invaded the Western Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, are gluttonous predators of native fish and invertebrates. One published study by Green et al. shows lionfish reduced the native fish prey community at some sites in the Bahamas by an average of 65% in just two years. Some sites had a 95% decline.



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Despite the dismal outlook, there is good news. Published studies show local control by divers and fishers can be effective, Akins notes. "Removing lionfish from local reefs is like weeding a garden. Remove weeds and the garden is healthier. Remove lionfish and the reefs are healthier. The key is regular removals, year round."

For more information on catching, cleaning and cooking lionfish, read the recently published Lionfish Cookbook or visit www.REEF.org/lionfish.



Four course lionfish dinner at Fish House Encore. Credit: Donna Dietrich.



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Lad Akins, REEF Director of Special Projects, shows the audience which spines contain venom. Credit: Andy Newman/Florida Keys News Bureau.



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Fish House Encore chef Peter Tselikis drizzles virgin olive oil over lionfish cured in sea salt, Cherokee Heirloom tomatoes, red onions and fresh cilantro. Credit: Donna Dietrich.

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