

Queensland Grouper (*Epinephelus lanceolatus*)

Habitat and Distribution: They are found in tropical and subtropical waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and Red Sea. The habitats you can find them in are coral and rocky reefs, caves, shipwrecks, and estuaries.

Size: Up to 9 feet in length; over 800 pounds

Wild Diet: Small fish, rays, crustaceans, sea turtles, crabs, and especially spiny lobster

Predators: Humans, large fish such as barracuda, sandbar sharks, great hammerhead sharks, king mackerel and moray eels, as well as other groupers

Lifespan: 25–50 years

Reproduction: Many groupers are protogynous hermaphrodites – a condition in which individuals first mature as females and later become males. Spawning occurs during the summer months and is strongly influenced by the cycle of the moon. The females release eggs while the males release sperm into the open offshore waters. After fertilization the eggs are dispersed by the water currents. The larvae transform into inch-long juveniles around 25 days after hatching. This animal is slow to reproduce.

Behavior: This fish doesn't move around a lot. It is territorial, usually hovering around coral or rock crevices. When free swimming, it usually skirts along the outcroppings of coral reefs.

Conservation Connection: Status: Vulnerable. Since a large area of reef is required to support such a large predator, their populations are always relatively low, even in areas that are not disturbed by people. This grouper is almost gone from reefs where people have overfished. The meat of this fish is quite popular around the world.

Interesting Facts: The body of most groupers is robust, meaning it is relatively large and heavyset. The mouth is large and has a lower jaw that sticks out containing bands of small teeth in front. The Queensland grouper can slurp up animals so fast the human eye cannot see it happen – it looks like the prey just disappears!

