

First record of the Indo-Pacific red lionfish *Pterois volitans* (Linnaeus, 1758) for the Dominican Republic

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Abstract

A new record of the Indo-Pacific red lionfish *Pterois volitans* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Osteichthyes: Scorpaenidae) is reported for the Dominican Republic, observed in the National Submarine Park of Monte Cristi on May 24, 2008. This is the first official reported record of this species for the Dominican marine area. Preliminary data are provided for the invasion and future work.

Key words: Caribbean, Dominican Republic, invasive species, lionfish

During the Reef Check Monitoring at the National Submarine Park of Monte Cristi, late May 2008, a single individual of the Indo-Pacific red lionfish, *Pterois volitans* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Osteichthyes: Scorpaenidae), was observed in the marine area behind the “Morro” named by the locals as “La Graja”, in the specific sites called “La Piedra de Kikim” (19°53'45"N, 071°37'58"W), on May 24, 2008, at 26.8 ft depth (Figure 1). The first sighting of this species was made by the marine park ranger Amalio Ortiz on May 20, 2008. This is the first documented and official publication of the new record of this species. Due to the lack of a permit this specimen was not collected.

The species identification was conducted by both authors using the FAO Identification Guide by Poss (1999), the publication of Schultz (1986)

and was supported by images available on the Nonindigenous Aquatic Species homepage of USGS (<http://nas.er.usgs.gov>). Although fish attributed to this species have been rumored to occur in Sosua Bay, Puerto Plata, Northeast of Monte Cristi, there has been no documentation before the present report. Since this observation more than twenty individuals were observed in the region.

Whitfield et al. (2002) point out that accidental or intentional release is frequent for this species, natural dispersal to the Dominican Republic also seems plausible given the abundance of this invasive species along the Atlantic North coast of the United States (Whitfield et al. 2007). While there is an aquarium trade in the Dominican Republic, this particular species is not commonly for sale. We

believe that this species may be spread by natural dispersion from the southeast of Florida and the Bahamas to the central Caribbean Sea, a route favored by marine currents. Therefore, this

individual may represent an extension of the lionfish population that occurs along the Atlantic coast of US, primarily southeast Florida and the Bahamas.



Figure 1. The lionfish individual observed in the National Submarine Park of Monte Cristi, Dominican Republic (Photograph by A. L. Franco)

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