

cancun area fish

Illustrations, Perry McFarlin
Technical advisor, Tony Anschutz (scubatomy.com)
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small fish

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Smallmouth Grunt



Sergeant Major



Blue Runner



Bluehead Wrasse



**Four-eye
butterfly fish**



**Juvenile
French Angel**



Yellow Tang



**Juvenile
Midnight Damsel**

You'll often see these swimming close to coral heads in shallow water. The Smallmouth Grunt, Sergeant Major, and Blue Runner, and Wrasse are often seen in small schools; the others are

typically seen alone and are more of a rare sighting (the Juvenile Midnight Damsel is the rarest among these). The Needlefish is found skimming along the surface of the water.

large fish

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Permit



**Ocean
Surgeonfish**



Blue Tang



Like the Angelfish, these fish have bodies about the size of a dinner plate (some are slightly larger). Several of these fish have razor sharp weapons to protect from predators. The Ocean Surgeonfish has a small scalpel located

near the tail which comes out for defense; the yellow tang has a similar scalpel which is marked yellow as a warning. The Ocean Triggerfish has a sharp trigger on top of its head that rises up when in danger.

don't step on these

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Stonefish



Flounder



**Lesser
electric ray**



**Southern
Stingray**

The Stonefish looks like a rock with rough textured body. You'll always find this fish hiding among rock or coral heads. Its sting can be fatal if not treated quickly. Avoid stepping on rocks, and do not touch if you see one.

Flounders and Rays bury themselves in the sand and can easily be stepped on. The sting is painful and medical attention is highly recommended. Shuffle your feet when walking in shallow water and they will swim away.

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spotting these is a real treat

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Spotted drum



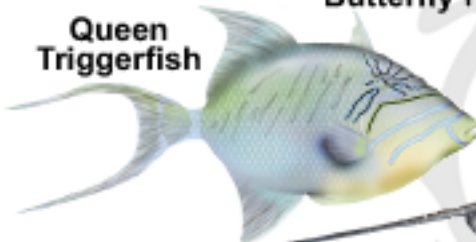
Spotfin Butterfly Fish



Honeycomb Cowfish



Squirrelfish



Queen Triggerfish



Nurse Shark



Green Moray Eel



Spotted Eagle Ray



Blacktip Reef Shark

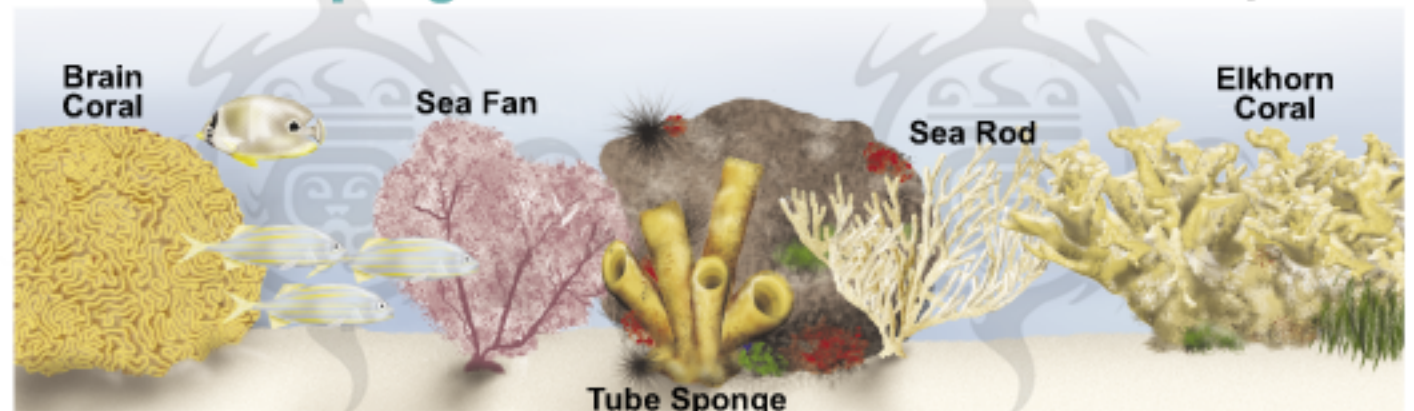


Spotted Moray Eel

Moray Eels (at left) are not rare, but you have to watch closely for them in crevices among the coral; the Spotted Eagle Ray is not rare, but it's truly a treat to watch one gracefully swim by. Nurse Sharks are not a danger to humans, but fun to see due to their size; the Blacktip Reef Shark is rarely seen, especially by snorkelers, however we have heard of sightings in the shallow water at the northernmost point of Cozumel.

corals and sponges

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Brain Coral

Sea Fan

Sea Rod

Elkhorn Coral

Tube Sponge

Most people think of coral as a type of strange rock, but these structures are actually formed from millions of tiny coral "polyps". The next generation of polyps attaches itself to these skeletons in a continually growing mass.

The reason you should not touch coral is that it can harm or kill the living polyps. They create these skeleton structures in an incredible assortment of colors and shapes.

A sponge is a living sea creature that feeds off of bacteria and algae in the water. The walls of a sponge have a network of tiny openings that allow water to pass through, while trapping bacteria.

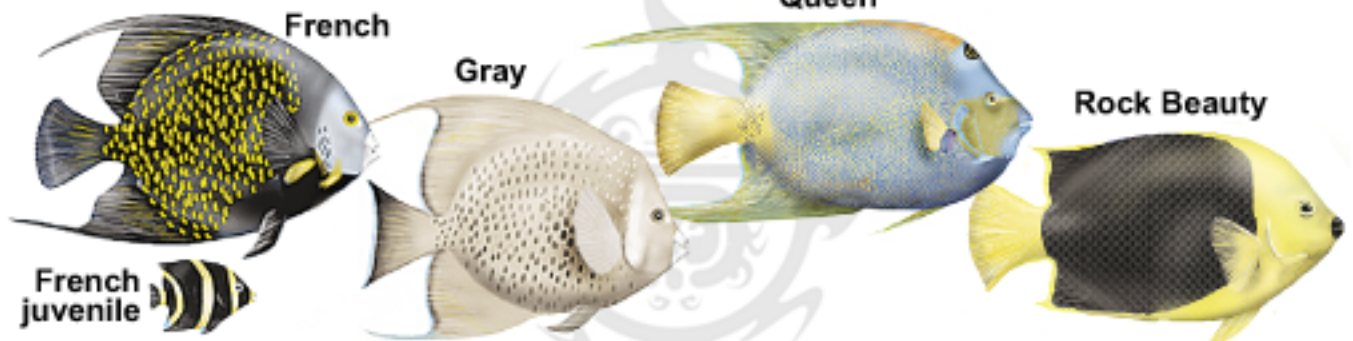
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angelfish family

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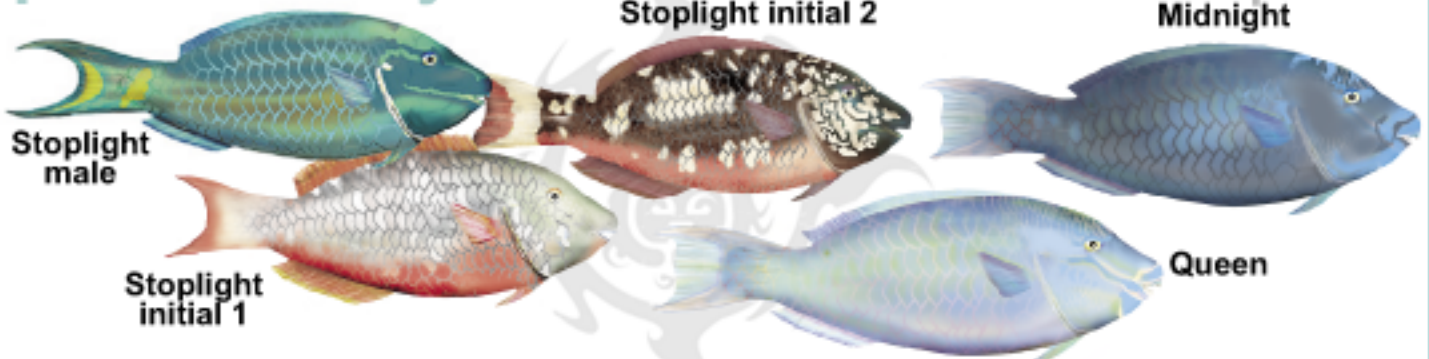


The French Angel, Gray Angel, and Queen Angel, are a very common sight in this area. You won't be as likely to see a Rock Beauty, especially in its adult size.

These adult fish all have bodies about the size of a dinner plate with flowing dorsal fins. Coloring of the French Angel is dramatically different in the juvenile stage (see small fish).

parrotfish family

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The Parrot fish is one of the most interesting in the sea. Most parrotfish begin life as females, and become male as they grow to a larger size. Their coloring changes along with this sex change and is most dramatic in the Stoplight Parrotfish as it progresses from grays and deep reds to a beautiful green, striped male.

Parrotfish have sharp teeth that they use to tear algae from coral. They grind up the coral and the finely ground waste becomes beautiful, soft, sand.

At night parrot fish wrap themselves in a cocoon that hides their sent from predators. You'll most often see the stoplight parrotfish and queen parrotfish when snorkeling.

slender fish

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The Barracuda, with its razor sharp teeth is commonly seen while snorkeling. It often hunts in shallow water looking for smaller fish to feed on.

The needlefish will usually be seen near the surface of the water and is often mistaken for

an infant barracuda. If you get close enough you'll see the needle-like nose that gives this fish its name.

The Trumpetfish hides in seagrass, most often nose down so it is camouflaged by the blades of grass as shown above.