

Marine Trumpetfish

Bonus content from the July 2009 FAMA magazine article "Fins Up, Heads Down."

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The native environments of the tube-mouthed trumpetfish include the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. Trumpetfishes can grow up to 2 feet in length in their natural habitat. These beautiful fish are very timid. They have small teeth that are situated at the end of a rigid, tubelike snout. The snout ends in a terminal mouth, which is used to snatch up prey — usually small fish — that are scurrying around among the reefs. Trumpetfishes and other fishes with a similar mouth structure belong to the fish order Syngathiformes. Other fishes in the group include the cornetfishes, pipefishes and seahorses, shrimpfishes and snipefishes.

The presence of a barbel under the chin and the absence of a whip ray extending from the caudal fin can distinguish trumpetfishes from similar looking cornetfishes. The most common color of trumpetfishes is a reddish-brown that can at times become blue-gray, yellow or many other shades in between. Two black spots, often seen on the tail fin, may be false eyespots that help to detract attention from the trumpetfish's vulnerable head.

The small dorsal and anal fins that are positioned far to the rear of the body create its silent stealthy movements. The fanning movements of these transparent fins allow the fish to swim forward or backward, or hover in horizontal or vertical positions with ease.

These fish are quite adept at changing color to suit their surrounding environment. They can be found drifting head down as they mimic stalks of seas grasses, whip corals and sea rods. Another camouflage trick that is employed by the trumpetfish is to hide behind another large species of fish like parrotfishes and sturgeonfishes and follow them like a shadow as they moves through the water.

Aquarium Conditions and Feeding

Although trumpetfishes are difficult to obtain, they are well worth the effort once you find a dealer who can special order them. I have known several aquariumkeepers who have kept a single trumpetfish in a 125-gallon aquarium along with different combinations of groupers, lionfishes, large triggerfishes and large wrasses. Just make sure you do not overcrowd the aquarium.

The water temperature for your trumpetfishes should be kept between 70 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit and a specific gravity of 1.020 to 1.025. Like the leaf fish, frequent water changes and a high-quality filtration system are a must if you want to keep this species healthy and happy.

Trumpetfishes will accept almost any live fishes offered as food. They particularly like very small wrasses. Feeding trumpetfishes can be a bit expensive, but if you have the means to do so, their behavior and beauty will astonish you as they live in your home aquarium system. Trumpetfishes should be fed every day. The amount fed depends on the size and temperament of the particular trumpetfish that you own.

Want to read the full story? Pick up the July 2009 issue of Freshwater And Marine Aquarium, or subscribe to get 12 months of articles just like this.