

Haemulon sciurus (Blue Striped Grunt)

Family: Haemulidae (Grunts)

Order: Perciformes (Perch and Allied Fish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



Fig. 1. Blue striped grunt, *Haemulon sciurus*.

[http://www.reefcolors.com/Galleries/2009_MariaLaGorda_IIB/photos/TG_238_6.jpg, downloaded 17 October 2016]

TRAITS. The blue striped grunt is a dusky yellow almond-shaped fish with blue horizontal stripes (Fig. 1). The upper jaw of these fish reaches below the centre of the eye, and they have oblique scales below the lateral line and enlarged ones above the lateral line (Bester, 2016). The general adult length ranges from 36-46cm and the maximum recorded weight of a blue striped grunt is 0.75kg (Froese and Pauly, 2013). Young ones have a rapid growth rate and gain almost 0.5mm in length per day. Blue striped grunt, its common name, came about by the practice of making grunting sounds by grinding its pharyngeal teeth. The sound is amplified by the swim bladder acting as a resonator (Bester, 2016).

DISTRIBUTION. From South Carolina, south to Brazil, consisting of the Caribbean Sea, Bermuda and Gulf of Mexico, the blue-striped grunt can be found in the western Atlantic Ocean (Fig. 2) (Bester, 2016).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. *H. sciurus* are found mainly in mangroves, reefs and seagrass beds about 30m in depth (Bester, 2016). The young ones are most common in shallow water. Adult blue

striped grunts can be found in either small or large groups (Fig. 3), over coral reefs and even mangroves (Beets et al., 2003). Juveniles are abundant in shallow turtlegrass beds. Nocturnal migrations are made by the adults into adjoining seagrass habitat, and during the day they return to diurnal resting sites (IUCN, 2016). In reef habitat, studies showed high site fidelity of these fish (Beets et al., 2003). They feed on crustaceans such as crabs, crayfish and shrimps, also bivalves and sometimes even small fish (Froese and Pauly, 2013). These fish are common in the western Atlantic and can be locally abundant. The main predators of the blue striped grunt are sharks. An endoparasite documented in this fish is the monogean fluke, *Encotyllabe spari* (Froese and Pauly, 2013). Spawning takes place during the months of January to April in the Caribbean Sea. The life span of this species is between 10-12 years (FLMNH, 2016).

BEHAVIOUR. Blue striped grunts are known to face and push each other with open mouths (Fig. 4). This behaviour is believed to be linked with courtship or territory defence (DCKW, 2016). They form schools which serve as a security measure against potential predators such as sharks and to increase reproductive opportunities (Fig. 5) (Froese and Pauly, 2013).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. The blue striped grunt is considered beneficial for humans because it is a source of food. It is listed as not endangered (IUCN, 2016), but overfishing can be a major threat. This fish is edible and is sold fresh, however, cases of ciguatera poisoning from consuming this fish have been recorded. They are also valued for public aquariums.

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Geographic distribution map of the blue striped grunt.

[<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/discover/species-profiles/haemulon-sciurus>, downloaded 18 October 2016]



Fig. 3. Blue striped grunts in a small group.

[http://www.bluewatervisitions.com/BAH-bluestriped_grunts.jpg, downloaded 19 October 2016]



Fig. 4. Characteristic behaviour of the blue striped grunt.

[<http://www.gudgeon.id.au/WebImages/Guess%2023a.jpg>, downloaded 18 October 2016]



Fig. 5. Formation of school to provide security against predators.

[http://tvblogs.nationalgeographic.com/files/2011/12/91a22f7f-95ab-486d-b983-fc0938709351.Full_.jpg, downloaded 19 October 2016]

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