

# Divers Alert!

## Report Marine Invaders

### 1-877-STOP-ANS

Non-native, invasive plants and animals can seriously damage Florida's precious marine environments and the economy they support. People inadvertently introduce organisms via bilge water, on boat hulls, or by releasing live plants and animals from aquaria. Please help prevent potentially devastating introductions by cleaning boats and not releasing live organisms! You can also help by reporting sightings of introduced species, through the nonindigenous aquatic species toll free hotline (1-877-STOP-ANS). To learn more about marine invasions or report a sighting on-line, go to: <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/>.

**The species below are already present in Florida waters:**



### Green Mussel

*Perna viridis*

**Florida Locations:** Tampa Bay (1999) to Charlotte Harbor (2002), St. Augustine to Ponce de Leon Inlet (2002)

**Suspected Vector:** ballast water release from ship

**Description:** Green mussels in the United States were first reported from Tampa Bay, where they clogged the intake pipes at several power plants during the summer of 1999. Since then, these mussels have spread south (probably larvae drifting on currents) and to the east coast of central Florida (possibly in ballast water or on ship hulls). Green mussels grow to 7 inches (18 cm), their shells are brilliant to dark green, and they survive best in saltwater (salinity of 27–33 ppt).

**Description:** Thousands of basketball-size Australian spotted jellyfish were seen in the Gulf of Mexico during the summer of 2000. In many areas, the jellyfish were packed so tightly that fishing gear was damaged and trawling was impossible. The bell of this jellyfish is white (semi-transparent to opaque) with bright white spots. Frilly tentacles extend below the bell. The Australian spotted jelly has a very mild sting.

### Australian Spotted Jellyfish

*Phyllorhiza punctata*

**Florida Locations:** Gulf of Mexico (2000), Indian River Lagoon (2001)

**Suspected Vector:** ship ballast or hull fouling



### Caulerpa

*Caulerpa brachypus*

**Florida Locations:** Palm Beach County (2002) to Fort Pierce (2003)

**Suspected Vector:** aquarium release or ballast water from ship

**Description:** *Caulerpa brachypus* produces small, undivided, elongate to oval fronds (blades) that are up to 1.25 inches (3 cm) long and less than 0.5 inches (1.3 cm) wide. The fronds are attached to a green, creeping stem (rhizome or stolon). This plant grows on rocks or in sediments down to 100 feet (30 m). It can overgrow corals and seagrasses. *C. brachypus* resembles both a native *Caulerpa* and the rare Johnson's seagrass, so divers should not collect specimens.

**Description:** The spectacular lionfish grows to 17 inches (43 cm). It has distinctive white and red stripes, fleshy tentacles around its face, fanlike pectoral fins, and 13 dorsal spines that contain extremely painful, but generally non-fatal, venom. This fish inhabits turbid lagoons and reefs down to 180 feet (55 m). It is generally found under ledges and feeds on small crustaceans and fishes. It spends most of its daylight hours immobile and may not swim away when disturbed. Instead, it may point its dorsal spines toward the intruder.

### Indo-Pacific Lionfish (Red Lionfish)

*Pterois volitans*

**Florida Locations:** Miami area (early 1990's), Jacksonville (2002)

**Suspected Vector:** home aquarium releases



The species on this side are likely to invade soon:



### Veined Rapa Whelk

*Rapana venosa*

**Vulnerable Locations:**  
sandy bottom areas in northeast Florida

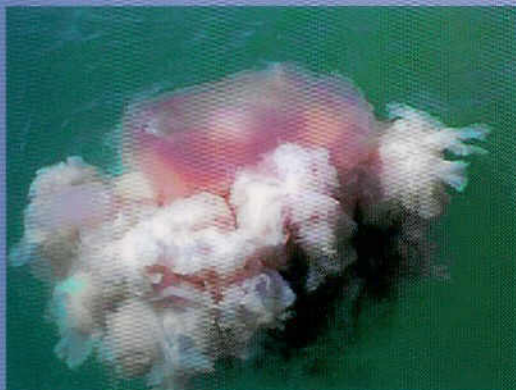
**Description:** Native to Asia, the veined Rapa whelk was first reported along the U.S. east coast (Chesapeake Bay) in 1998. Rapa whelks may have been introduced via ballast water or as egg masses associated with marine farming. Larvae of this whelk will probably float on ocean currents to places beyond Chesapeake Bay. Adult whelks can reach 7 inches (18 cm) and they can consume large numbers of native oysters and other shellfish.

**Description:** In 1984, *Caulerpa taxifolia* was accidentally introduced into the Mediterranean Sea. It now dominates these shorelines by overgrowing native plants and animals, which has caused local fishing and tourism to plummet. This plant was discovered in California in 2000 and in Australia in 2001, and both areas are spending millions of dollars on eradication. A native *C. taxifolia* strain occurs in the Florida Keys; only the Mediterranean (or aquarium) strain is a problem.

### Feather Caulerpa

*Caulerpa taxifolia*  
Mediterranean strain  
(or aquarium strain)

**Vulnerable Locations:**  
all marine waters where aquarium dumping occurs



### Carnivorous Jellyfish (or Big Pink Jellyfish)

*Drymonema dalmatinum*

**Vulnerable Locations:**  
Gulf coast. Huge numbers were recorded in the Gulf of Mexico in the fall of 2000.

**Description:** Pink, carnivorous jellyfish reach 3 feet (90 cm) in diameter, and their densely packed tentacles can stretch to 70 feet (21 m). Pink jellyfish often float upside down on the surface of the water. Their sting ranges from mild to severe. In the Gulf of Mexico, pink jellyfish primarily eat moon jellyfish, *Aurelia aurita*. This jellyfish may have been swept into the Gulf by currents coming north from Caribbean waters.

**Description:** Chinese mitten crabs were first recorded in San Francisco Bay in 1992, and they have spread both north and south in California. Chinese mitten crabs have also been sighted in Lake Erie and the waters of Louisiana. The common name for these crabs comes from the distinctive, hairy "mittens" on their front claws. Adults average 3 inches (8 cm) across their backs (carapaces). Mitten crabs spend most of their life in freshwater, and adults migrate to saltwater to reproduce. A single adult female can produce up to 1 million larvae that can be spread by ocean currents for up to 2 months.

### Chinese Mitten Crab

*Eriocheir sinensis*

**Vulnerable Locations:**  
freshwater and estuarine areas in northern half of the state



## Produced by the Tampa Bay Estuary Program

(727) 893-2765 • [www.tbep.org](http://www.tbep.org)



Lionfish photo courtesy of Bishop Museum, Hawaii. Rapa whelk photo courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey. *Caulerpa brachypus* photo courtesy of the South Florida Water Management District. Spotted jellyfish and carnivorous jellyfish images belong to Dauphin Island Sea Lab. *Caulerpa taxifolia* photo by Dr. Linda Walters.