

Fish Memory Cues (common AGRRA species)

Angelfishes

Queen Angelfish

The Queen has a crown (dark blue spot on forehead ringed with bright blue).

French Angelfish

This fashionable French beauty is dressed in classic black (with gold highlights).

Gray Angelfish

As its name implies, the Gray is gray to grayish brown.

Rock Beauty

This little beauty is yellow and black. The juvenile is bright yellow with a small black spot (ringed in blue). The black spreads as the fish grows covering most of the fish as an adult.

Butterflyfishes

Banded Butterflyfish

White with black bands (thick diagonal black markings).

Foureye Butterflyfish

Large false “eyespot” near tail.

Spotfin Butterflyfish

Small black spot on the rear of the bright yellow dorsal fin.

Reef Butterflyfish

Uncommon – identification by process of elimination (no good memory clue).

Longsnout Butterflyfish

Tiny fish with long pointy snout (as name implies). Usually found deep.

Surgeonfishes

Blue Tang

Blue with contrasting yellow “tang” (spine on base of tail). Juveniles change from all yellow to combination of yellow and blue to all blue as adult.

Ocean Surgeonfish

Clear pectoral fin – think “Clear Ocean”. Leading edge of pectoral fin clear to yellowish but never opaque.

Doctorfish

Dark pigmented leading edge of pectoral fin – think “Dark Doctor”.

Silvery (Miscellaneous)

Bar Jack

Most common jack with black and blue “crowBAR” along back and onto lower tail fin.

Permit

Rounded shape due to high back profile. Orange area at base of anal fin.

Great Barracuda

Large, silvery, toothy torpedo. Most divers (and non-divers) know this species.

Sheepshead Porgy

Small black spot at base of pectoral fin. Upper jaw overbite.

Saucereye Porgy

Bluish saucer-shaped line below eye.

Jolthead Porgy

Large mouth with thick lips. Yellow-orange at corner of mouth.

Pluma

Blue rectangular patch behind eye. Looks like a feather or ‘pluma’ in Spanish.

Grunts

French Grunt

Diagonal gold markings like the gold braids worn on a French General’s uniform.

Bluestriped Grunt

Blue horizontal stripes over yellow body. If pale in shallow water, black rear dorsal and tail fin are good ID cue.

Smallmouth Grunt

Small grunt – (Small Mouth). Silvery fish with horizontal yellow lines and yellow fins.

White Grunt

All fins white. Body checkered pattern of pearly white, blue & yellow formed by scales. Thin stripes only on head.

Caesar Grunt

Silvery with thin yellow lines like raw egg drizzled over a Caesar salad. Dusky rear dorsal, anal, and tail fins like the dusty feet of Caesar’s army.

Tomtate

Whitish fish with two thin yellow lines (one midbody through eye, the other on back). Usually a black spot at base of tail. Think of a Tom-Tom (a small drum) with the two yellow lines as drum sticks.

Cottonwick

Black line from the snout through the eye fades as it reaches the tail. Think of the black cotton wick of a candle. Usually have a black diagonal stripe that runs along the back and onto the tail.

Spanish Grunt

Large grunt with horizontal black lines and a yellow saddle on the base of the tail. Think of the fried egg in a Spanish omelet.

Sailors Choice

Silvery gray fish with distinctive black spots on scales covering the body; gold ring encircles the eye. Think pirates (who were sailors) with the black spots as rows of waves and the gold ring as a golden earring.

Porkfish

Two black diagonal bands on head (one through eye and the other just behind the gills). For pork, think of the bands as two strips of overcooked bacon.

Black Margate

The large black patch on the side of this fish makes the Black Margate easy to remember.

White Margate

About the size of a Black Margate but without the black patch. Very steep forehead with high back profile. Eye is tiny with white iris.

Snappers**Mutton Snapper**

This species is easiest to ID if you know that its scientific name is *analis* since it is the only snapper with a pointed (not rounded) anal fin. It usually has a small black spot on the back ("the button on the Mutton") which we can use to remember its common name.

Cubera Snapper

This is the largest of the snappers (up to 3'), usually solitary, and often with pale bars across back.

Gray Snapper

Gray with no distinguishing features other than a dark diagonal band that occasionally runs from lip across eye.

Dog Snapper

Has "teardrop stains" below eye. For the girls we say the fish is crying because it lost its dog; for the guys we go for the more macho memory cue of "dog tags".

Mahogany Snapper

Silvery white fish with "Mahogany" red margin on tail; sometimes reddish tinge on body or other fins.

Lane Snapper

Though sometimes faint, this fish has yellow "lane" markers (think highway) along its body. It may have a small black spot just below the rear dorsal.

Yellowtail Snapper

Bright yellow midbody stripe continues onto yellow tail. Feed in the water column high above reefs.

Schoolmaster

Large silvery white fish with all yellow fins. Think of a yellow school bus when you see the yellow fins.

Damselfishes**Yellowtail Damselfish**

The only damselfish we need to know and one of the easiest to remember as it has a yellow tail. Juveniles are bright blue with brilliant blue spots. The tail is translucent on very young juveniles.

Groupers/Sea Basses

Nassau Grouper

The black saddle is the easiest way to ID this fish. Think “Ride the Nassau Grouper back to the Bahamas”.

Graysby

Most common of the smaller groupers. Grayish brown with 3-5 pale or dark spots along back along base of dorsal fin. Think of the pairs of spots along the back as bullet holes – the fish was “grazed” by gunfire.

Red Hind

Reddish spots over a lighter background rear fins (rear dorsal, tail, and anal) edged in black. Think “RED with a black beHIND”.

Rock Hind

Have a black saddle (and usually additional black blotches along back under the dorsal fin). Think of these spots as “rocks”.

Coney

This variable species can be reddish brown, bicolor (upper dark lower pale), or a brilliant yellow so color is not a good ID cue. The body is usually covered with tiny blue spots. One constant is that it has two spots on the lower lip and two on the base of the tail.

Black Grouper

Blotches on back squarish. Think “Black Bricks” or “Black Blocks”.

Tiger Grouper

Have “tiger-strips” across back. Also have some pretty impressive canine teeth.

Yellowmouth Grouper

Corners of the mouth a distinctive yellow. Margins of pectoral fins pale.

Yellowfin Grouper

Margins of pectoral fins yellow. Blotches on back are more oval and not squarish like the Black Grouper.

Parrotfishes

Blue Parrotfish

Adults are blue with no markings. Juveniles have a yellow wash on the head.

Midnight Parrotfish

Dark navy (“midnight”) blue with some lighter blue on body (especially on head).

Rainbow Parrotfish

“Rainbow” colored with orangish head and tail and bright green rear body.

Queen Parrotfish

TP: Queen has a moustache and beard (blue/green markings around mouth).

IP: Black and white like a chess board.

Stoplight Parrotfish

JP & IP: Bright red belly (like a stoplight).

TP: Small yellow spot at top of gill cover. (Like the yellow light in a middle of a traffic light?)

Princess Parrotfish

TP: Tail bordered with pink. Think "Pink Princess".

JP: Looks like the Striped Parrotfish juvenile but doesn't have a gold nose. Think "The Princess has no gold".

Striped Parrotfish

TP: The tail is not bordered in blue (not pink like the "Pink Princess").

JP: The Princess Parrotfish may be royalty but it is the Striped that has the gold (on its nose).

Redband Parrotfish

Exceedingly variable parrotfish. Only the TP have the namesake "redband" across the cheek. In all of the other JP/IP color variations, look for the white spot (saddle) on the base of the tail.

Redtail Parrotfish

TP: Red crescent in the middle of the tail.

IP: Red tail (and body) – mostly reddish gray can be pale.

Yellowtail/Redfin Parrotfish

Name comes from small reddish spot at base of pectoral fin but yellow tail is usually more visible. I always remember this fish by both of its names when I see it and think "yellowtail => redfin".

Greenblotch Parrotfish

Tiny parrotfish named Greenblotch for the green blotch on the side of the TP. The JP/IP are usually red to yellowish red. All phases have a bright yellow-gold to red iris.

Wrasses/Hogfishes**Hogfish**

The spiky front dorsal fin is like the bristles on the back of a razorback hog.

Spanish Hogfish

Think of the purple area across the top of the body as stain from a bottle of Spanish wine.

Puddingwife

White splotches on back of common intermediate phase.

Yellowhead Wrasse

Distinctive yellow head on TP. Wavy lines behind eyes on juveniles.

Slippery Dick

Dark spot on upper part of gill cover. Dark triangular corners on tail of TP. White with black mid-body stripe on JP.

Pufferfishes**Bandtail Puffer**

Two dark bands on tail and a row of spots along the mid-body.

Porcupinefishes**Balloonfish**

Long spines all over body especially on head. No black spots on fins.

Porcupinefish

Black spots on all fins.

Boxfishes

Spotted Trunkfish

Black spots over white background. White area around mouth.

Leatherjackets (Triggerfishes & Filefishes)

Queen Triggerfish

The Queen is long eyelashes (the black lines radiating from the eyes) but like the Queen Parrotfish, she has a blue moustache.

Ocean Triggerfish

Uniformly gray and usually swimming high in the water column. Has a black spot at base of pectoral fin.

Black Durgon

Usually black overall (with pale bluish white lines along base of dorsal and anal fins. Can have a bluish or greenish cast.

Whitespotted Filefish

Large orange, brown and gray colored fish often with large white spots. Commonly seen in pairs with one fish showing spots, the other without. Pair of orange spines at tail base.

Orangespotted Filefish

Dusky brownish color with small orange spots (more intense on back and toward tail). Small white saddle on tail is distinctive.

Exotic Invasive

Lionfish

One or more species of the Scorpionfish family commonly known as lionfish are now aggressively naturalizing in the waters of the Tropical Western Atlantic. Lionfish can be easily identified by the featherlike pectoral and dorsal fin rays. The dorsal on top as well as the paired fins below (ventral & anal) are capable of inflicting a venomous sting. Envenomations are rarely fatal. The toxin is only active in living lionfish as it degrades quickly once the fish is dead.