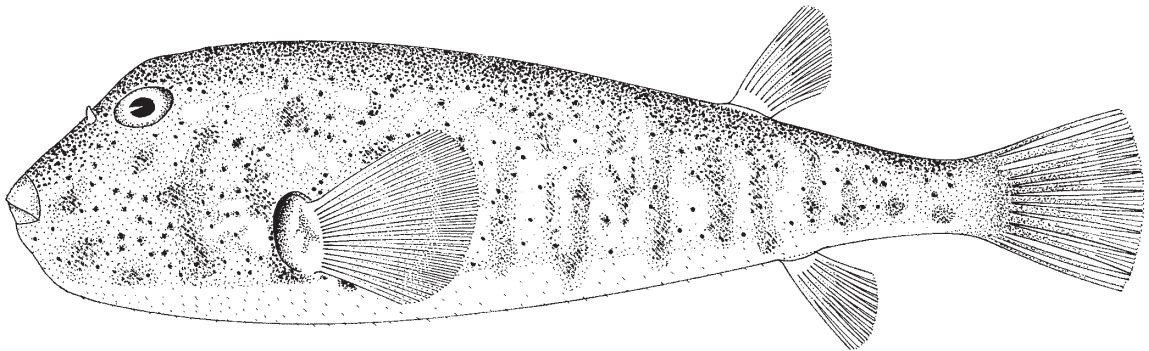


Sphoeroides maculatus (Bloch and Schneider, 1801)

PUF

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Sphoeroides nephelus* (Goode and Bean, 1882).

FAO names: **En** - Northern puffer; **Fr** - Compère bigarè; **Sp** - Tamboril norteño.

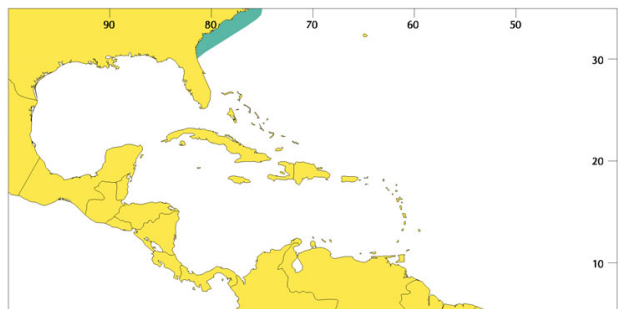


Diagnostic characters: A blunt-headed fish with heavy jaws forming a beak of 2 teeth in both upper and lower jaws. Dorsal and anal fins set far back near caudal fin; dorsal fin usually with 8 soft rays (no spines), anal fin with 7 soft rays (no spines); **pectoral fins with 16 rays**; pelvic fins absent. Body covered with prickles from around mouth region to dorsal and anal fins. **No lappets on head or body. Colour:** upper side grey or brown with poorly defined black spots and saddles; belly yellow to white; **tiny jet-black pepper spots (about 1 mm in diameter) scattered over most of pigmented surface**, particularly evident on cheeks; **lower sides with a row of black, elongate, bar-like markings.**

Size: Maximum 250 mm; common to 200 mm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Found in bays and estuaries, as well as offshore waters to depths of at least 60 m. Not a schooling species, but often occurring in large disorganized aggregations. Feeds primarily on shellfish, occasionally on finfish. The landings within the area, as reported by the USA, are negligible, but catches are higher further north; caught mainly with crab pots and on hook-and-line; marketed fresh as 'Sea squab'; reportedly non-toxic, but often confused with toxic species.

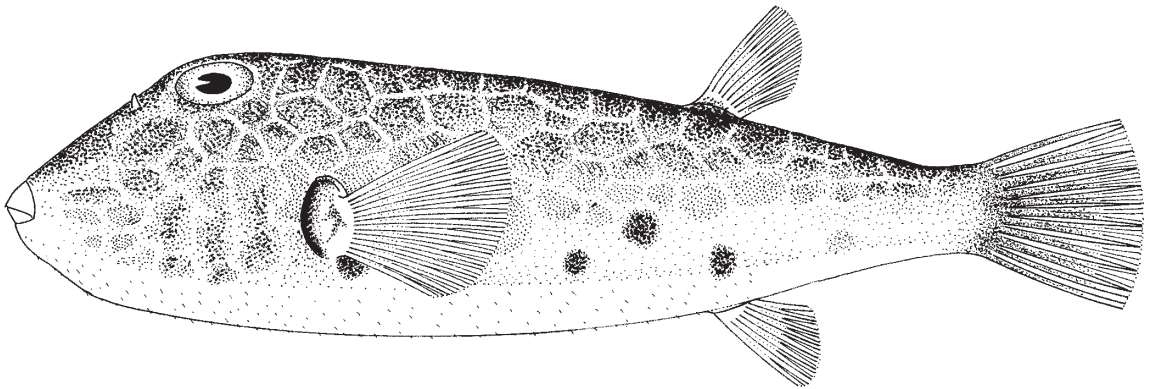
Distribution: Restricted to the northern part of the area, off northeast Florida, northward extending to Newfoundland.



Sphoeroides nephelus (Goode and Bean, 1882)

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Sphoeroides parvus* Shipp and Yerger 1969.

FAO names: En - Southern puffer; Fr - Compère foutre; Sp - Tamboril futre.

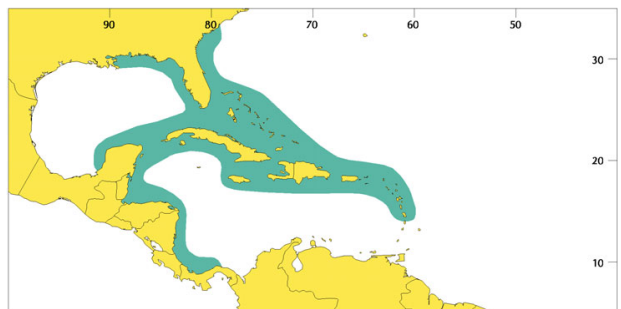


Diagnostic characters: A blunt-headed fish with heavy jaws forming a beak of 2 teeth in both upper and lower jaws. Dorsal and anal fins set far back near caudal fin; dorsal fin usually with 8 soft rays (no spines), anal fin with 7 soft rays (no spines); **pectoral fins usually with 14 rays**; pelvic fins absent. Prickles (small spinules) covering variable portions of trunk, occasionally absent. **No lappets on head or body.** **Colour:** upper side brown, with large dark grey to black spots and light (pale blue or green in fresh specimens) irregular-shaped reticulations. Lower side with an irregular row of dusky to black rounded spots; **the axil spot the most intense in the series**; sexually mature, ripe males sometimes covered with brilliant red or orange spots of about 1 mm in diameter (white in preserved specimens).

Size: Maximum 250 mm; common to 200 mm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Frequents shallow waters of bays and estuaries to depths of 20 m. Usually a loner, except around bridges and piers where loose aggregations may occur, especially along eastern Florida; feeds primarily on shellfish, also on some finfish; taken on hook-and-line; not a good foodfish, has been reported as mildly toxic; occasionally mixed with *S. maculatus* as 'Sea squab'.

Distribution: Throughout most of the Caribbean Sea and in the eastern part of the Gulf of Mexico; rare along the Central American coast, absent from the South American coast.

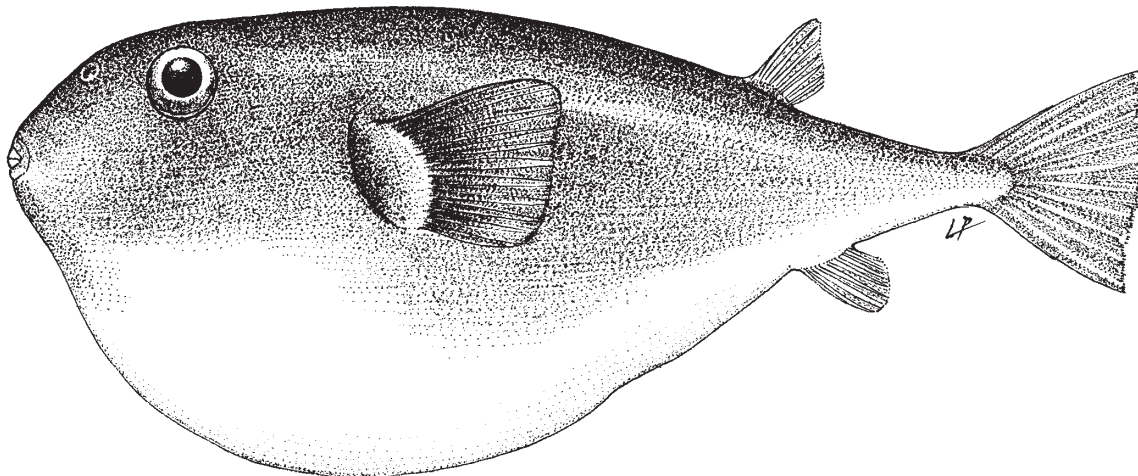


Sphoeroides pachygaster (Müller and Troschel, 1848)

TSP

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

FAO names: En - Blunthead puffer.



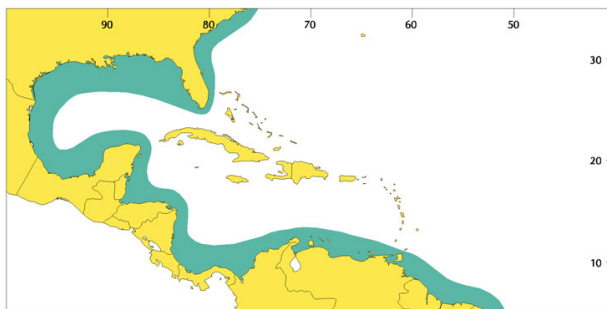
Diagnostic characters: A pufferfish with an extremely blunt head, with heavy jaws forming a beak of two teeth in both upper and lower jaws. **Body totally devoid of prickles and lappets.** Dorsal and anal fins set far back near caudal fin. **Dorsal fin usually with 9 soft rays, anal fin with 8 or 9 soft rays.** **Colour:** uniform brown or grey on dorsal and lateral surfaces, fading ventrally to a totally unpigmented ventral surface.

Size: Reaches about 250 mm, common to 200 mm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: This is a deep water (to 400 m) species at central latitudes, although it may be taken at shallower depths in more temperate regions. Little is known of its natural history, and no known fishery exists for the species.

Distribution: Found in all oceans of central and temperate latitudes.

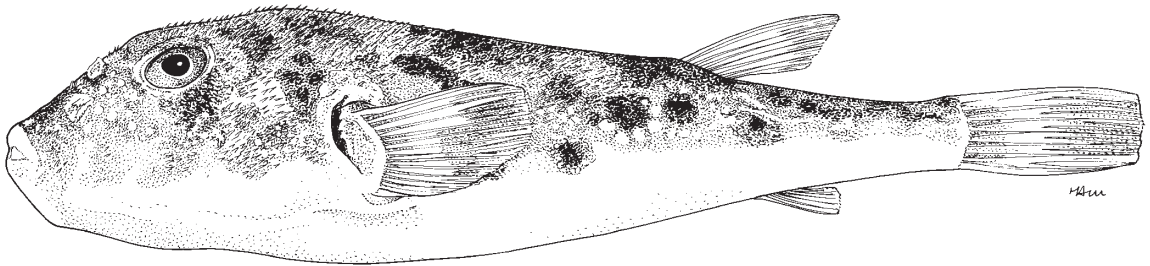
Remarks: This is the most wide-ranging species of the genus *Sphoeroides*, and the most anatomically aberrant form. It may prove not to be congeneric with the other species.



Sphoeroides parvus Shipp and Yerger 1969

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Sphoeroides nephelus* (Goode and Bean, 1882).

FAO names: En - Least puffer.

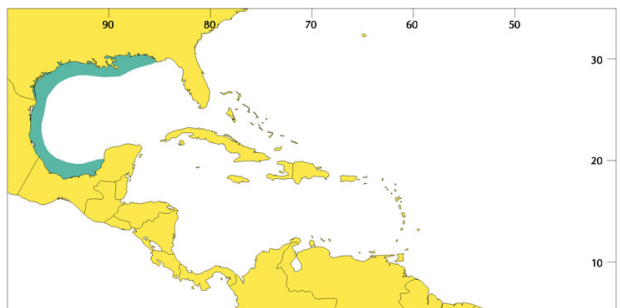


Diagnostic characters: A blunt-headed fish with heavy jaws forming a beak of 2 teeth in both upper and lower jaws. Dorsal and anal fins set far back near caudal fin; dorsal fin with 8 soft rays (no spines), anal fin with 7 soft rays (no spines); **pectoral fin usually with 15 or 16 rays**, pelvic fins absent. **Prickles present from the snout to near dorsal fin, and chin to near to anus ventrally, and present laterally on cheeks and to near level of dorsal fin. Lappets absent. Colour:** dorsally and laterally, basal pigmentation is a light grey or brown, with numerous spots and blotches, especially evident on lower flanks, where they form an irregular row near the ventrolateral body angle; **an axil spot present, but is no more intense than other lateral spots and blotches**; ventral surface unpigmented.

Size: Common to 100 mm, largest known specimen near 150 mm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: This is the most common coastal/shelf pufferfish of the western Gulf of Mexico. It is extremely abundant on open sandy-mud bottoms, which are heavily trawled for shrimp. It matures by 100 mm. Although no fishery exists for this species, it is frequently taken as bycatch in shrimp trawls. It has not been shown to be toxic, but extensive toxicity studies have not been performed.

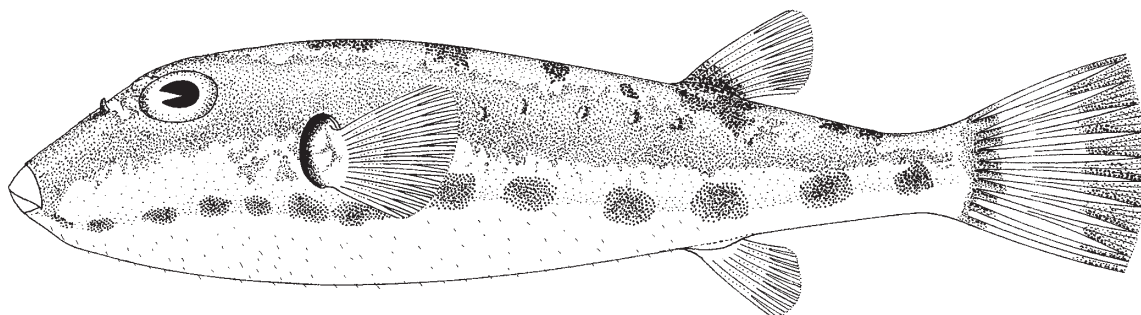
Distribution: Restricted to the western Gulf of Mexico, from the Florida panhandle to the Bay of Campeche.



Sphoeroides spengleri (Bloch, 1785)

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Sphoeroides nephelus* (Goode and Bean, 1882).

FAO names: En - Bandtail puffer; Fr - Compère collier; Sp - Corrotucho mataperros.



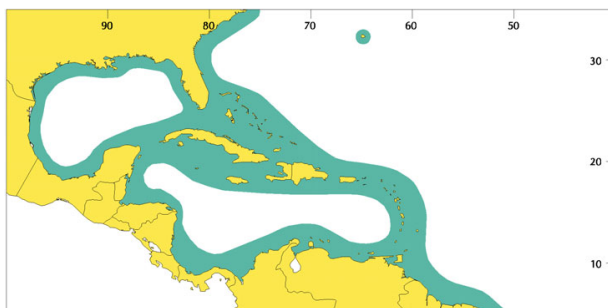
Diagnostic characters: A somewhat blunt-headed fish with heavy jaws forming a beak of 2 teeth in both upper and lower jaws. Dorsal and anal fins set back near caudal fin; dorsal fin usually with 8 soft rays (no spines), anal fin with 7 soft rays (no spines); **pectoral fins usually with 13 rays**; pelvic fins absent. **Prickles covering a small area of upper side and belly. Lappets present on lower part of back and on sides. Colour:** upper side brown or grey with some large black spots, belly white; **lower sides bordered with a very even row of 11 to 14 sharply defined round dark spots**; lappets flesh-coloured; **caudal fin with a black or very dark bar at its base and another at its posterior margin.**

Size: Maximum to about 150 mm; common to 120 mm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: A loner, nowhere abundant, most frequent in about 10 to 40 m depth around reef areas and submerged aquatic vegetation. Preys mostly on attached or benthic invertebrates. Not commercially sought. Caught mainly on hook-and-line, and with traps or trawls, but not frequently taken. Not a foodfish, as it is definitely toxic.

Distribution: Widespread throughout the area, including Bermuda; northward extending to Massachusetts, southward to Rio de Janeiro (Brazil).

Remarks: Of all the pufferfishes in the area, this is the species most frequently implicated in toxic reactions. The produced toxin, tetrodotoxin, is extremely potent, and can frequently result in death if ingested.

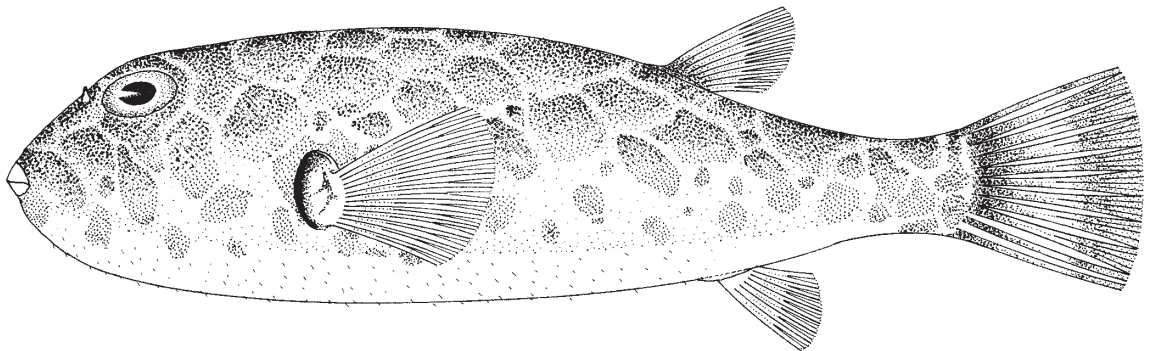


Sphoeroides testudineus (Linnaeus, 1758)

FDT

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

FAO names: En - Checkered puffer; Fr - Compère corotuche; Sp - Corrotucho común.



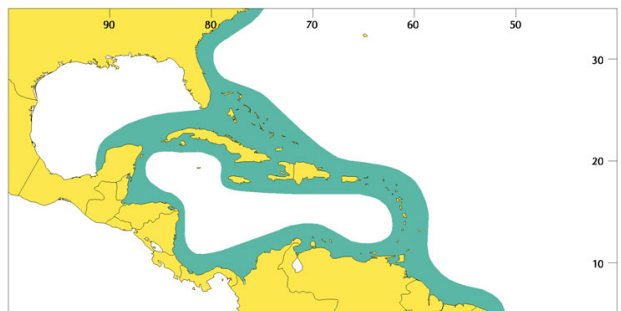
Diagnostic characters: A blunt-headed fish with heavy jaws forming a beak of 2 teeth in both upper and lower jaws. Dorsal and anal fins set far back near caudal fin; dorsal fin usually with 8 soft rays (no spines), anal fin with 7 soft rays (no spines); **pectoral fins usually with 15 rays**; pelvic fins absent. **Prickles covering most of body, but usually imbedded and not noticeable to the touch. Lappets absent. Colour:** upper side chocolate brown to black, **with light (yellow or white) bold markings, especially 1 or 2 distinct transverse bars between eyes and a regular geometrical pattern of coarse arches and circular markings** on back; belly white to yellow; lower sides heavily spotted.

Size: Maximum to 300 mm; common to 200 mm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: One of the most common fish species in mangrove areas and estuarine coastlines; confined to very shallow waters over mud or sand bottoms. Does not school, but may form huge aggregations; feeds primarily on shellfish through most of its range; avoided where abundant, because of its toxicity; taken in beach and boat seines, fish traps, and on hook-and-line. Known to be lethally toxic to humans. Its principle utilization is as poison when fed to pest animals (cats, dogs, etc).

Distribution: Coastal waters along the Atlantic coast of Florida, around the Antilles, on the Campeche Bank, and along the Atlantic coasts of Central and South America south to Santos (Brazil); absent from most of the Gulf of Mexico and Bermuda. Extremely common throughout the Caribbean Sea, especially mainland coasts.

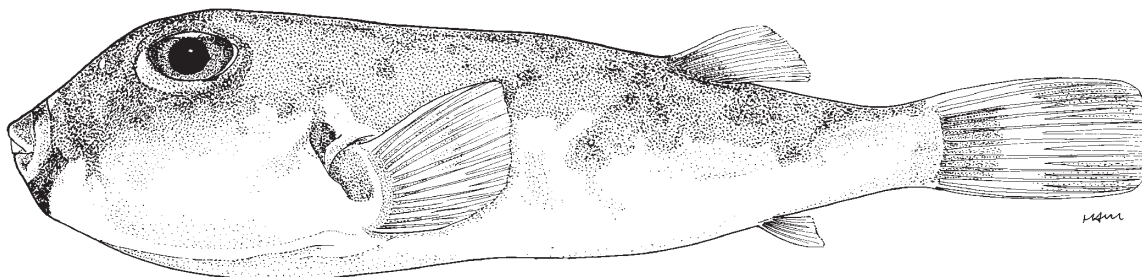
Remarks: This species is one of the most abundant finfish species in mangrove areas of the Central American coast. Its toxic qualities are well known to artisanal fishermen.



Sphoeroides tyleri Shipp 1972

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Sphoeroides nephelus* (Goode and Bean, 1882).

FAO names: En - Bearded puffer.



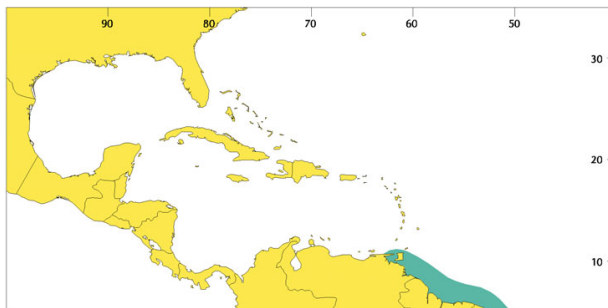
Diagnostic characters: A moderately blunt-headed fish with heavy jaws forming a beak of 2 teeth in both upper and lower jaws. Dorsal and anal fins set far back near caudal fins; dorsal fin with 8 soft rays (no spines), anal fin usually with 7 soft rays (no spines), **pectoral fin with 15 or 16 rays**; pelvic fins absent. **Lappets are located laterally, concentrated near the ventrolateral body angle.** Prickles present over most of body anterior to dorsal and anal fins. **Colour:** dorsally, a uniform tan coloration fading laterally and disappearing completely above the ventrolateral body angle; **chin distinctly pigmented, very dark on either side with a light area medially.**

Size: Common to 100 mm, rarely to 125 mm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Taken in coastal areas and depths from 10 to 80 m, preferring sponge and shell bottom. Otherwise little is known of this rarely collected species. Apparently no fishery exists.

Distribution: Occurs from Colombia to east central Brazil.

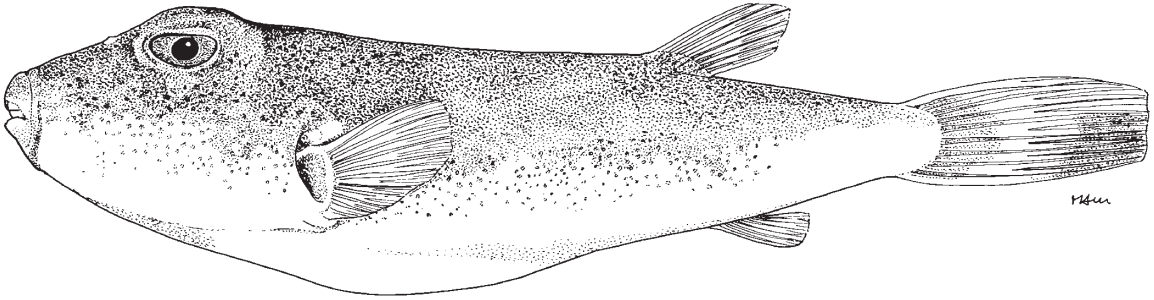
Remarks: Likely to be toxic.



Sphoeroides yergeri Shipp 1972

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

FAO names: En - Speckled puffer.



Diagnostic characters: A small, moderately blunt-headed fish with heavy jaws forming a beak of 2 teeth in each the upper and lower jaws. Dorsal and anal fins set far back near caudal fin; dorsal fin usually with 8 soft rays (no spines); anal fin usually with 7 soft rays (no spines); pectoral-fin rays usually 14; pelvic fins absent. **Flanks with numerous light coloured lappets. Prickles present dorsally and ventrally, and sometimes laterally. Colour:** dorsum a uniform grey or brown, **replaced laterally by numerous tiny specks** against a light background; belly white.

Size: Small, rarely approaching about 120 mm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: This is a little known species, occurring in clear waters (to 35 m) of the mainland Caribbean. There is no known fishery for the species.

Distribution: Central America from Belize to Colombia.

Remarks: This species is so rarely collected that information on its biology and distribution is suspect, as well as its potential toxicity. However, its close relationship to the highly toxic bandtail puffer (*Sphoeroides spengleri*) suggests that its toxic level may be potent.

