

# MARINE AQUARIST® FREE

DEDICATED TO SUCCESSFUL SALTWATER AQUARIUM KEEPING

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## NASO HEXACANTHUS

## BLACKTONGUE UNICORNFISH SLEEK UNICORNFISH UNICORN TANG



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**RANGE:** *Naso hexacanthus* is found from the Red Sea & East Africa including the Mascarene Islands to the Hawaiian, Marquesan & Ducie islands, northwards to southern Japan & southwards to Lord Howe Island. (see Map 1 for more)

**POPULATION:** *Naso hexacanthus* is uncommon in depths less than about 15m, but abundant in deeper water, particularly near escarpments (Randall 2001b). It is moderately common in Raja Ampat, Indonesia (Allen 2003b).

In the Philippines, this fish is also abundantly caught by spearfishers during jellyfish season. These skilled hunters use breathholding spear techniques at night during the new moon and hook & line fishing during the day. In Hawaii an average of 1,400 kg/year is harvested. It is a commercial species in the Tuamotos and French Polynesia (de Loma et al. 2009).

*Naso hexacanthus* is often seen in large aggregations. Its diet consists almost exclusively of large gelatinous plankton. Juveniles feed on macroscopic & turf algae. It is herbivorous up to age 2. This fish can live up to about 40 years.

**REPRODUCTION:** Males have characteristic mating colours when courting in open water. Caudal knives in males are enlarged (J.H. Choat pers. comm. 2010).

*N. hexacanthus* have been observed forming spawning aggregations on the Great Barrier Reef (Johannes 1981). It's size at sexual maturity is 450 mm in length (Choat and Robertson 2002a).

**DESCRIPTION:** Unlike other unicornfish (*Naso* Genus), it will not develop a horn. However, when it reaches just under 10 inches (25 cm) in length, it will develop a black tongue. This is probably the largest tang to be sold in the aquarium industry (over 2 1/2 feet in length). Only the largest tanks can house this flashy and impressive display fish.

**AQUARIUM CARE:** The *Naso* genus is comprised of peaceful fish that get along with most other marine fish and can be kept with a variety of tank mates including other genus' of surgeonfish. However unless you have a huge system (hundreds of gallons), it is best to house just one *Naso* tang per tank.

The Sleek Unicornfish is not reef safe, as this rambunctious fish will topple corals while swimming around. This fish may eat algae, and will often nip on invertebrates. This pretty specimen is most suitable for an extremely large display tank or a public aquarium.

The *Naso hexacanthus* requires a lot of water turbulence highly saturated with oxygen rather than a placid aquarium. Since it is very active, it needs plenty of room to swim and crevices for retreat & sleep at night. Feeding can include various worms, shrimps, and algae. Once they get accustomed to aquarium foods they are quite hardy and good eaters.

Like other surgeon or tang fish, the *Naso hexacanthus* has sharp razor-like spines at the rear of the body and in front of the tail. Thus, aquarium keepers should always exercise caution. ♦



Map 1. *Naso hexacanthus* Distribution