Life Under Water

Streaked spinefoot (*Siganus javus*)

Siganus javus is commonly known as the streaked spinefoot or fox face. It is a species of rabbitfish, named perhaps because the fish constantly twitches its upper lip like a rabbit twitching its nose! Rabbitfishes belong to the family *Siganidae*, which has one genus and about 27 known species. Indian waters house thirteen species of rabbitfishes. *S. javus* shows a fairly wide distribution across the Indo-Pacific waters. There are also recent records of occurrence of this fish from the eastern Mediterranean Sea, possibly a result of the Lessepsian migration (migration through the Suez Canal) or shipping by humans. *S. javus* occupies shallow coastal waters, brackish lagoons, rocky and coral reefs. The species is bronze coloured above and white on the belly and thorax, and has golden yellow cheeks with bluish spots. Slender and pungent dorsal spines, stout anal spines, typical spots on the upper half of the body, and wavy stripes on the ventral part also help identify the species. Individuals of the species are generally about a foot long but can grow up to 53 cm. Occurring in small schools of about 10 individuals or so, they are diurnal herbivores feeding on algae attached to the substratum or floating midwater. While considered an important food fish, the dorsal and anal fins contain toxins, which, although not fatal, can be quite painful to handlers. The fish have commercial use as food and aquarium fish and the species is listed as least concern by the IUCN.

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Photo credit: Nikhil Thomas (photo taken in the Bay of Bengal near Puducherry, India).