

***Chromileptes altivelis* (Valenciennes 1828)**
Humpback Grouper

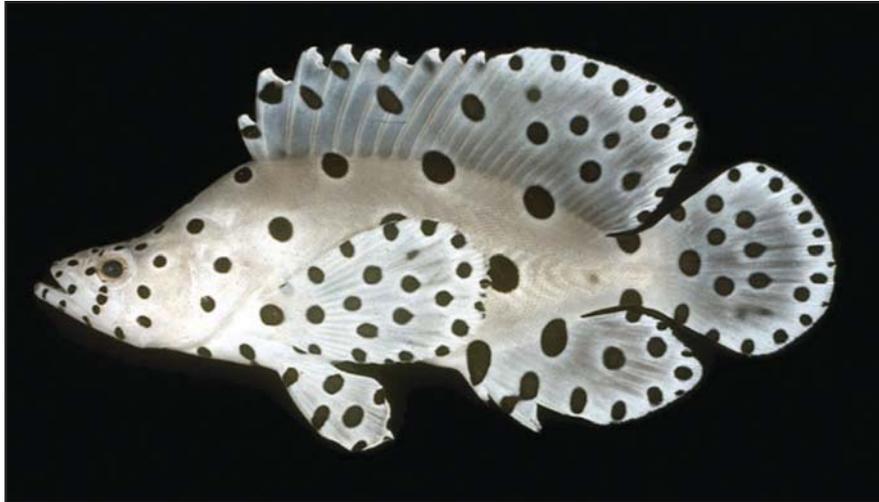


Photo by J. Randall, Bishop Museum

Identification: The body is distinctly spotted (dark spots on a light background). The head profile is unique amongst the groupers, as it is depressed anteriorly and elevated posteriorly, rising sharply at the nape. Pectoral and caudal fins rounded. Dorsal fin X (17-19), anal fin III (9-10); pectoral rays 17-18. The genus *Chromileptes* contains only one species, the Humpback Grouper. Grows to 66 cm TL. Also called the Barramundi Cod or Panther Grouper. From Heemstra and Randall (1993) and Randall et al. (1996).

Similar Species: Greater Soapfish (*Rypticus saponaceus*) has grey to dark body color, lacks dark body spots. Spotted Soapfish (*R. subbifrenatus*) has tan to brown body color and pale borders around dark spots.

Native Range: In the Western Pacific; southern Japan to Palau, Guam, New Caledonia and southern Queensland, Australia. In the eastern Indian Ocean; from the Nicobar islands to Broome, Western Australia. Reports from the western Indian Ocean (Heemstra and Randall 1984, 1986) are unsubstantiated, except one from Kenya (Smith 1954) which seems valid (Heemstra and Randall 1993).

Ecology: The Humpback Grouper is a reef-associated species and will inhabit reefs that are highly complex as well as those that are dead or silty. The species is found at depths ranging from 1 to 40 m, and is often found in very shallow water – even stranded in pools at low tide. It is very secretive, and feeds on fishes and crustaceans. From Heemstra and Randall (1993), Randall et al. (1996), Myers (1999) and Allen et al. (2003).

Due to habitat degradation and heavy pressure on native stocks (from the aquarium and fishing industries), it is one of only two groupers assessed by the IUCN as “Endangered” (Morris et al. 2000).

Nonindigenous Occurrences: The species has been observed in Tampa Bay (1984), off Boca Raton (pre-1995), in the Indian River Lagoon near Cocoa (2003), off Pompano Beach (2005 and 2006) and off West Palm Beach (2007). It was also introduced to Hawai’i, but is now considered extirpated (Munday 2005).

