Hypsoblennius invemar Smith-Vaniz & Acero P. 1980
Tessellated Blenny

Photo by T. Rauch

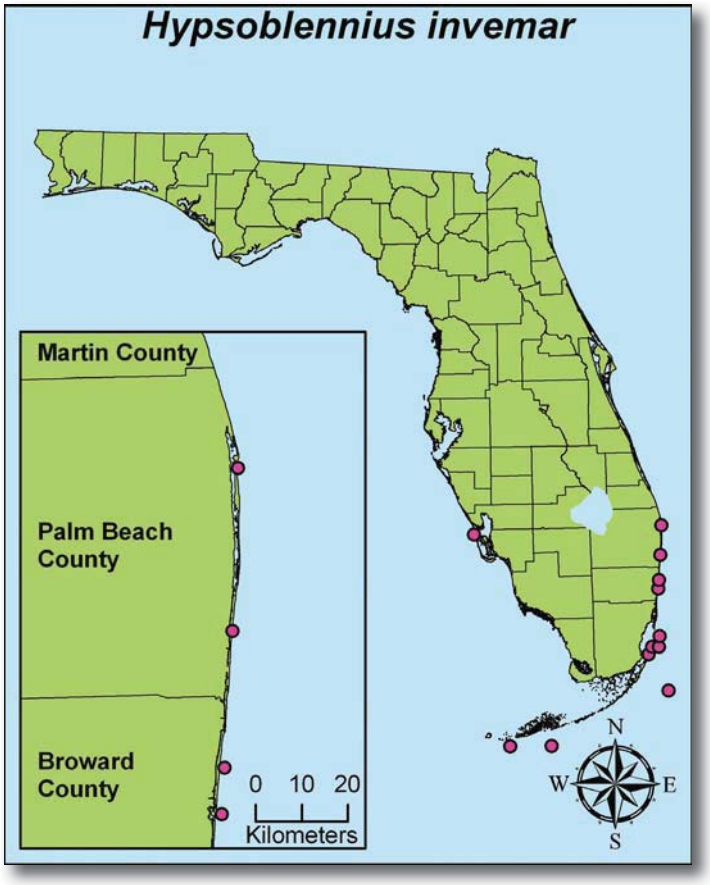
Identification: Numerous orange or brick-colored spots outlined in black (smaller than the eye) cover most of the head, pectoral-fin base, and anterior body over a bright blue background. Spots often merge on the top of the head to form a reticulated pattern. The species is small-bodied, attaining a maximum size of approximately 6 cm SL. Dorsal fin XI-XII (12-13); anal fin II (13-14). From Smith-Vaniz (1980) and Hoese and Moore (1998).

Smith-Vaniz (1980) revised the western Atlantic *Hypsoblennius*. A key to the Blenniidae of the western central Atlantic is given in Williams (2002); this key was modified for the Gulf of Mexico by McEachran and Fechhelm (2005). Gulf species can also be keyed with Hoese and Moore (1998). Meristics for adults and larvae were given by Ditty et al. (2005). Larvae of five common Gulf of Mexico species are described and illustrated in Ditty et al. (2005).

Similar Species: Orangespotted Blenny (*Hypsoblennius springeri*) lacks black outline surrounding red spots.

Native Range: The species is native to the Lesser Antilles, Venezuela, Colombia, and Brazil. It might be native to the northern Gulf of Mexico, but is generally thought to be introduced, possibly through shipping (either in barnacles attached to hulls or in ballast water) or during the transport of oil rigs from South America.

Ecology: The species lives in empty barnacle tests of the Mediterranean

barnacle (*Megabalanus antillensis* [= *Balanus tintinnabulum*]) on pilings and oil platforms. It is usually recorded from depths of less than 4.5 m, but can rarely range to 18 m (Topolski and Szedlmayer 2004). The species is found in abundance where the hydroid *Cnidoscyphus marginatus* is abundant (Smith-Vaniz 1980). Males brood egg masses inside the barnacles (Smith-Vaniz 1980). Rauch (2000, 2003) observed that blenniid assemblages on petroleum platforms in the Gulf of Mexico are highly structured (through competition) and change little over time. Additionally, blenniid assemblages appear to remain relatively constant, even after the passage of a hurricane (Rauch 2000, 2003).

Nonindigenous Occurrences: Established in the northern Gulf of Mexico, including Alabama, Texas, and Louisiana. Inhabits the tests of barnacles on oil platforms from Cameron, Louisiana to south Texas (Hoese and Moore 1998) and off Dauphin Island, Alabama (Ditty et al. 2005). First documented from oil platforms off Cameron, Louisiana and Galveston, Texas in 1979; not present at Galveston before 1979 (Dennis and Bright 1988). Observed off Palm Beach, Florida since 1992 (P. Humann, pers. comm.). In Florida, spotty occurrences along the Atlantic coast of south Florida and the Florida keys, with several occurrences off Boca Grande.