Scatophagus argus (Linnaeus 1766)
Spotted Scat

Identification: The body of the Spotted Scat is quadrangular and strongly compressed. The dorsal head profile is steep and the snout is rounded. Spines and rays of the dorsal fin are separated by a deep notch. Small ctenoid scales cover the body. The body is greenish-brown to silvery with many brown to red-brown spots. Males have a concave curvature of the head above the eye, whereas in females the head ascends at a constant slope. Juveniles are greenish-brown with either a few large, rounded blotches (approximately the size of the eye) or 5-6 broad, dark vertical bars. Individuals greater than about 4 cm SL have blackish spots (typically slightly smaller than eye) loosely arranged in vertical rows. In large adults, the spots can fade and appear only dorso-laterally. Adults can reach approximately 30 cm TL, but occasionally larger individuals are observed (see Khan 1979). Sometimes called the Spotted Butterfish (especially in literature from India) or Common Scat. Dorsal fin XI (16-18); anal fin IV (14-15). Pectoral fins with 16-17 rays. Pelvic fins with 1 spine and 5 soft rays. From Barry and Fast (1992), Kottelat (2001) and Allen et al. (2003).

It is unclear whether nominal S. argus is in fact composed of more than one species. Differences in the marking pattern (i.e., bars versus spots, size of spots) of juveniles has lead to contention over whether the species should be partitioned. The “Red Scat” (Scatophagus argus rubifrons) might not be a distinct variety of scat, but merely a developmental stage of the common Spotted Scat (Barry and Fast 1992).

Similar Species: No similar species in Florida.
**Native Range:** Nearshore waters of the Indo-Pacific, from southern India and Sri Lanka to southern Japan and Tahiti. Includes northern Australian coast, Philippines, Indonesia, and the Southeast Asian coast (Kottelat 2001). The species occurs in fresh, brackish, and marine waters.

**Ecology:** The species lives in coastal muddy areas including estuaries, mangroves, harbors, and the lower courses of rivers (Bianchi 1985; Rainboth 1996). The Spotted Scat has a broad diet and eats detritus, filamentous algae, phytoplankton, aquatic macrophytes, zooplankton, benthic invertebrates, and other macrozoobenthos (Khan 1979; Datta et al. 1984; Rainboth 1996). Barry and Fast (1992) reported that adults from the Philippines were primarily herbivorous while the juveniles preferred zooplankton. Females mature at about 7-9 months of age and 150 g, while males mature at a smaller size (Barry and Fast 1992). In the Philippines, spawning is triggered by monsoon rains that begin in June and July and bring rainfall, cooler temperatures, increased river outflows, and lower salinities (Barry and Fast 1992).

The scat has venomous spines that can inflict painful wounds that ache for several hours (Barry and Fast 1992).

**Nonindigenous Occurrences:** The species was collected at Seahorse Key (near Cedar Key) in 1992.