

***Tilapia mariae* Boulenger 1899**
Spotted Tilapia



Photo by H. Jelks, USGS

Identification: The species has six to nine black lateral blotches that fade into bars and continue up onto the dorsal fin. Maximum size is approximately 30 cm SL. Dorsal fin XV to XVI (12-15); anal fin III (X to XII). From Page and Burr (1991).

Native Range: The species is native to the Atlantic slope of western and central Africa, from Ivory Coast to southwestern Ghana and from southeastern Benin to southwestern Cameroon (Thys van den Audenaerde 1966; Trewavas 1974).

Similar Species: No tilapias are native to Florida and no native species are similar to tilapias.

Ecology: Although most tilapias are mouth brooders, the Spotted Tilapia does not brood eggs or young in its mouth. It lays turquoise-blue eggs on the substrate and both parents aggressively guard the newly-hatched young (Taylor et al. 1986; Loftus and Kushlan 1987; Annett et al. 1999). In southern Florida, it breeds from the spring to the fall (Loftus and Kushlan 1987). Like most other non-native cichlids established in Florida, it is an aggressive species and can disrupt the ecologies of other fishes (Courtenay and Hensley 1979). The Spotted Tilapia sometimes hybridizes with the Redbelly Tilapia (*Tilapia zillii*; Taylor et al. 1986).

Nonindigenous Occurrences: First reported from the Snapper Creek canal in Miami (Hogg 1974), the species is now common in most freshwater habitats of south Florida, sometimes venturing into estuarine areas. Along the Atlantic coast, it ranges north to Melbourne (Shafland et al. 2008). The species has also been introduced into Arizona and Nevada.

