



BLUE TANG

PARACANTHURUS HEPATUS

DID YOU KNOW?

Juvenile blue tangs are bright yellow with blue spots by their eyes and light blue tipped fins. Their bodies become blue as they mature.

WHERE AT AQWA?

Find “Dory” amongst the vibrant colours of AQWA’s Far North exhibit area.

SIZE: <38CM

DIET: ALGAE

MAIN PREDATOR:
LARGE FISH EG.
TUNA, GROUPE

HABITAT: CORAL
REEF

FOUND: TROPICAL
WATER INDO-
PACIFIC OCEANS

BUILT-IN WEAPONS

The blue tang belongs to the *Acanthurus* ‘thorn-tailed’ family who have a venomous dagger-like thorn on each side of the tail. These are concealed when relaxed but can be quickly drawn to slice a pursuing predator. The venom inside cause severe pain, to small predators as well as humans.

Blue tangs don’t just use their weapons for defence - Males are often aggressive toward one another, having “sword fights” to win more territory.

AVOIDANCE SYSTEMS

The blue tang’s vibrant blue colour can deter attacks by acting as a warning sign of its hidden danger. If the blue tang’s weapons and warning colour fail, its flat body helps it easily turn and slip into the small spaces of a reef to escape!

Blue tangs may also “play dead” by lying on their side and staying still until the predator swims away.

NUMBER 6 FISH?

The “number 6 fish” is just one of the blue tangs many nicknames - Can you see a number 6 in its dark blue pattern?

Counting is also important to the classification of tangs and surgeonfish. Many have such similar features that they are distinguished by the number of small bones in their fins. Blue tangs have 9 hard and 26-28 soft bones in the fin that runs along their back (the dorsal fin).

REEF ROLE - GARDENERS

Blue Tangs are important to reefs as they feed on algae that can overgrow corals. They generally choose *Pocillopora* and *Acropora* corals, using their branches as homes and ‘weeding’ them of algae.