



LÀGGUA (steephead parrotfish)

Scarus microrhinos

Parrotfish are closely related to the wrasses, called a'aga in Chamorro, but have teeth which are fused into a distinctive beak. They use this beak to scrape green filamentous algae from the surfaces of dead coral or rock. They also eat large amounts of the dead coral rock scraped loose by their beaks. The scraped particles are passed through and settle on the bottom as sand. Some parrotfishes also eat leafy seaweeds or coral. Most parrotfish travel and feed in groups, sometimes mixing with other algae-eating fishes such as surgeonfish and rabbitfish. Parrotfish sleep on the bottom at night, often tucked away into a hole.

Juvenile parrotfish are dull in color, usually brown to gray and often striped when less than about two inches long. Larger juveniles, females, and some males of most kinds are brown or gray (these are called palakse' in Chamorro). This is known as the initial phase because both male and female parrotfishes have this color phase after they lose their juvenile color. Some of the largest females eventually change color and sex to a brilliant and mostly blue and green color phase. At this stage, they are in the terminal phase and are called làggua in Chamorro. All terminal phase fish are males which started out as females. Males which started out as males cannot change to the terminal phase color pattern nor can they change sex.

The humphead parrotfish, called atuhong in Chamorro, reaches a size of about 47 inches (120 cm) and can weigh up to 165 pounds. Atuhong get much larger than other parrotfish and have a more prehistoric look to it than the smaller, streamlined parrotfish. The smaller parrotfish are caught by nets, although all sizes can be taken by spear. There are 19 different kinds of parrotfish in Guam's waters.