



SESYON/HITENG (rabbitfish)

The rabbitfish is an important and highly-prized food fish. Its spines along the back and underside are venomous and can cause an extremely painful sting.

There are five kinds of rabbitfish on Guam. The two most abundant kinds, hiteng (*Siganus argenteus*) and sesyon (*Siganus spinus*), arrive from the open sea as tiny silvery, transparent fish, locally called "manâhak." This usually occurs around the last quarter moon in April and/or May and occasionally in October.

A long-standing cultural tradition with Chamorros, the manâhak harvesting season is always eagerly awaited by talayeros or cast net fishermen. During a good seasonal run, millions of manâhak invade the reefs where, for only a few days, talayeros are able to scoop them up in fine-mesh nets. After that, the manâhak begin to feed on algae and start to gain their reef color pattern. At this stage, they are known as dâgge' and for several months, are not considered very good to eat because of their bitter taste. When they reach adult size, they are called hiteng and sesyon and again can be caught seasonally when they group in reef areas to spawn, usually in March and April.

The increase in jet ski activity has created problems between jet ski operators and talayeros who line the shores of Guam waiting to harvest the schools of manâhak. When manâhak start to run, talayeros say the motor activity forces the small schools of manâhak to break up into even smaller groups, making capture difficult and even threatening some traditional manâhak fishing areas. The conflict has resulted in a user plan which now restricts jet ski use in certain areas during manâhak runs.

Hiteng can occur in large schools that roam the reef feeding on algae they have scraped from the bottom. They tend to live in deeper lagoon areas or the outer slope beyond the reef edge. Sesyon are usually found in smaller groups, although they sometimes occur in large schools. They live primarily on reef flats and in shallow lagoons. Hiteng can grow as large as 14 inches (36 cm) while sesyon reach a size of about 11 inches (28 cm).

Sesyon or hiteng can be caught by using nets, spears, and hook and line. A green stringy algae, known in Chamorro as chaiguan, is used as bait to capture them.