



## TATAGA' (bluespine unicornfish) *Naso unicornis*

A popular food fish, the tataga', as the bluespine unicornfish is called in Chamorro, is one of a group of unicornfish which develops a prominent horn on the forehead. Most unicornfish have two pairs of sharp blade-like spines at the base of the tail. These are used for defense and can easily cut the hand of a careless fisherman. The blue color around the base of the spines serves as a warning signal to would-be predators that this fish may be dangerous to capture and eat.

Tataga' are the most common unicornfish of shallow reef slopes where they sometimes occur in groups. They are most abundant in surgy outer reef areas, but also are found along lagoon and channel slopes to a depth of about 100 feet (30 m). They feed on attached and floating seaweed and are especially fond of leafy brown Sargassum seaweed, called chaiguan in Chamorro. A skilled fisherman can hook them in channels by using chaiguan as bait. They are also caught along the reef margin by using spear and cast net. Tataga' may reach a length of 22 inches (46 cm), excluding the tail filaments.

Young tataga', called guassa' in Chamorro, do not have a horn and settle from the reef as nearly-transparent larvae after having lived in the surface waters of the open sea for as long as two months. Unicornfish larvae get unusually large, up to two inches (5 cm), before they settle on the reef. That is why it is almost impossible to find smaller young on the reef. Large tataga' larvae have distinctive dark spots on the back and are a common prey of m̄him̄ahi, w̄hoo, tunas, and young billfishes.

Three other horned unicornfish also occur in Guam's waters. The common spotted unicornfish (*N. brevirostris*) has dark spots with vertical streaks on its body and a whitish tail. The less common white-margin unicornfish (*N. annulatus*) has a thin white border around its tail; in its younger stages, it also has a white band around the small of the tail. The rare humpback unicornfish (*N. brachycentron*) has a bizarre-looking hump on its back, but only the males develop horns.