

## *Quassiremus ascensionis* (Blackspotted Snake Eel)

Family: Ophichthidae (Snake Eels)

Order: Anguilliformes (True Eels and Morays)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



**Fig. 1.** Blackspotted snake eel, *Quassiremus ascensionis*.

[<http://biogeodb.stri.si.edu/caribbean/en/thefishes/species/2856>, downloaded 31 October 2016]

**TRAITS.** The blackspotted snake eel *Quassiremus ascensionis* is a relatively small eel reaching a maximum length of 71cm. Its body is stout, gradually decreasing in size to the rear or tail. Its head is pale grey with a dense pattern of dark spots, and the body is grey with red-brown rings around large black spots along the back and sides (Fig. 1). The frontal nostril is tubular and overhangs the snout (Fig. 2). They have single rows of pointed teeth on the jaws and roof of the mouth, and vertical gill openings in front of the dorsal fin. The pectoral fins are very small, less than the eye diameter.

**DISTRIBUTION.** The blackspotted snake eel is a rare species of the tropical marine climate, found in places such as Bermuda, the Bahamas, Dominica, St. Vincent, the Gulf of Mexico and much of the Lesser Antilles, and is likely to occur in Trinidad and Tobago. It is also known from the Ascension Islands in the eastern Atlantic (Fig. 3).

**HABITAT AND ECOLOGY.** The blackspotted snake eel lives only inshore, at depths no greater than 12m. They mostly dwell on the bottom except if hunting. They bury themselves, creating burrows in soft sand, mud or gravel, leaving their head emerged waiting for passing prey. They use their black spots surrounded by red brown rings to camouflage from their prey to allow for easier hunting with the element of surprise, as they are relatively small compared to larger predators. They also reside in coral reefs and vegetation (for example turtle grass) which aid in camouflage, this environment also supplies sufficient prey for them to thrive as small fish and crustaceans also live in a similar environment.

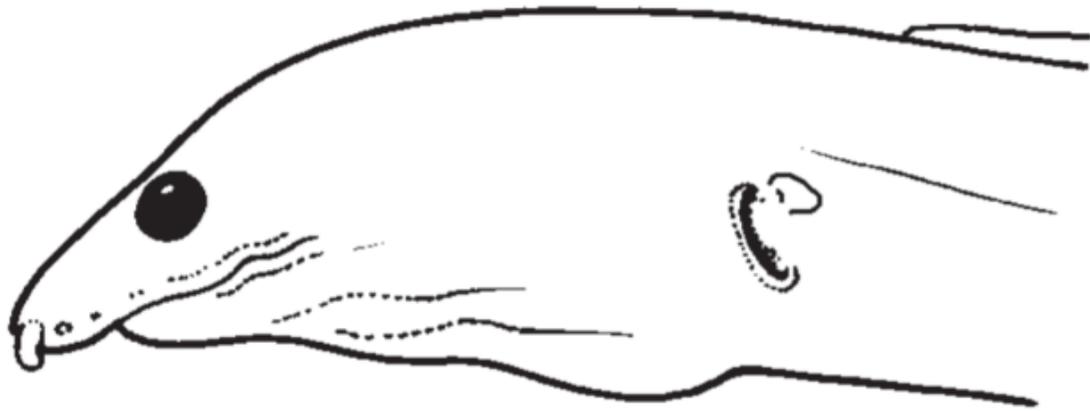
**REPRODUCTION.** The blackspotted snake eel produces pelagic larvae which live in open water away from the reef while they grow from 1-20mm in length. Not much is known about this phase but most dispersal is done here. They are left to survive on their own until they find a coral reef to reside.

#### REFERENCES

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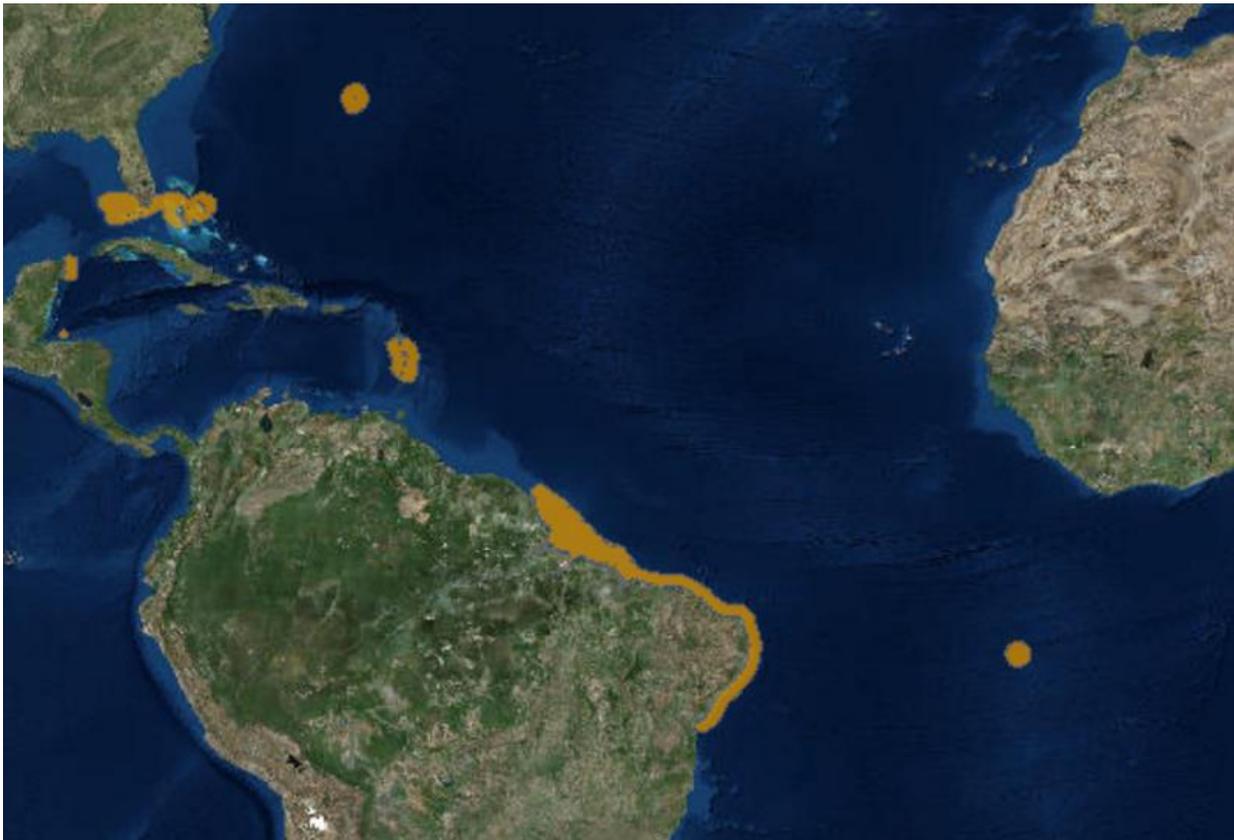
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**Fig. 2.** Blackspotted snake eel, lateral view of head.

[<ftp://193.43.36.93/docrep/fao/009/y4161e/y4161e09.pdf>, downloaded 31 October 2016]



**Fig. 3.** Blackspotted snake eel geographic distribution.

[<http://maps.iucnredlist.org/map.html?id=199398>, downloaded 31 October 2016]