

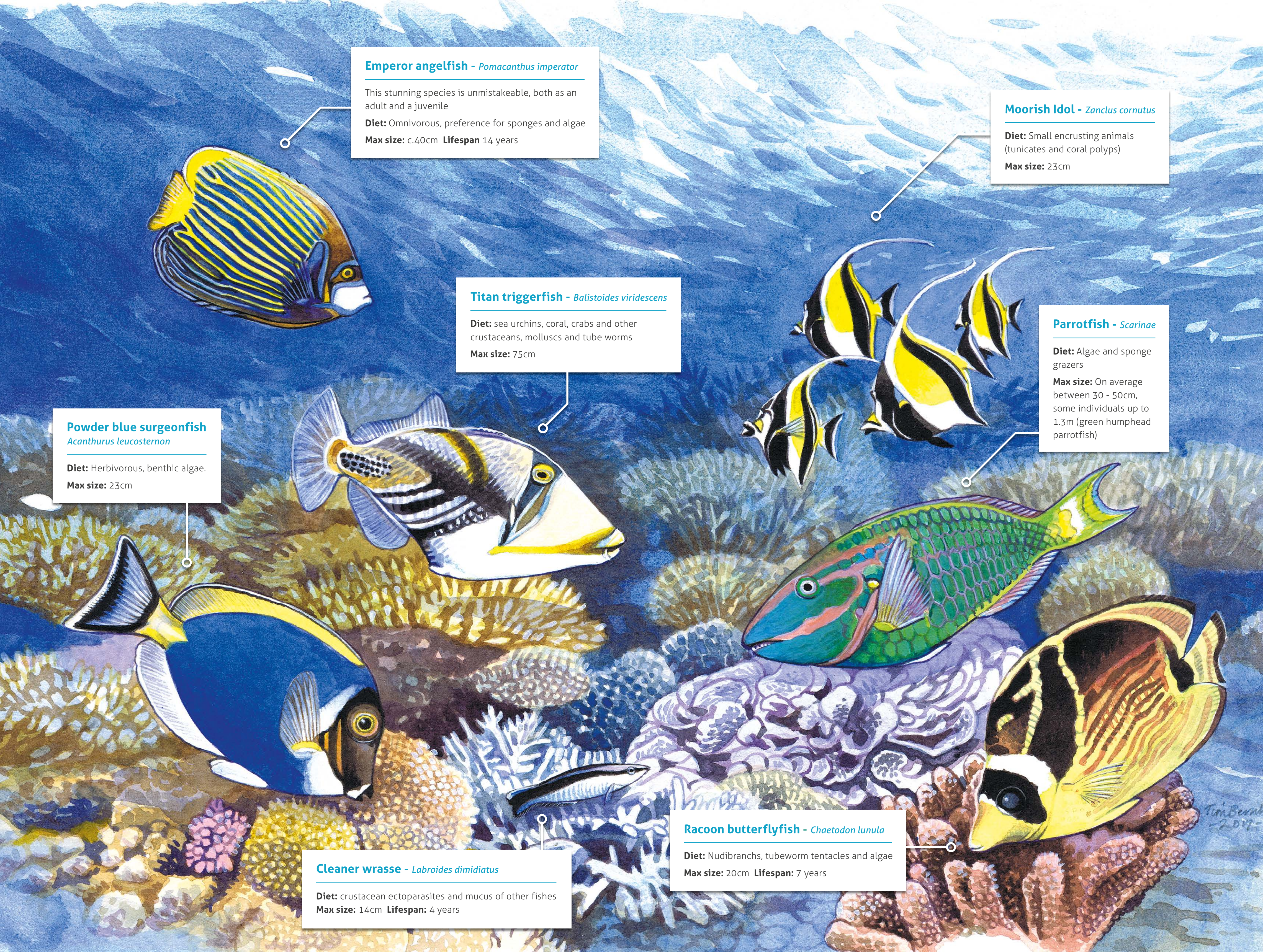
Reef Fish

The bright clear waters of the coral reefs of the British Indian Ocean Territory are home to a myriad of fish, in every shape and size and in a riot of colour. For many species, colourful patterns are a means of attracting attention – they serve to announce their presence, perhaps to attract a mate or to deter a rival from entering their territory. At the same time the remarkable patterns can serve to distract or confuse predators. **Butterflyfish** are amongst the most striking of all – their bright colours enable instant identification, even from far away, but predators can be confused by the strong black lines and eye stripes, which break up their silhouette.

Another bright, if diminutive, little fish is the **cleaner wrasse** whose black and white stripes are further highlighted by an electric blue stripe. For them colour is an advertisement, attracting fish of all shapes to come to their territories where they perform a remarkable service: picking their way carefully over their visitors to remove scraps of dead skin or parasites – they even swim into the mouths and gills of predators but are never eaten – their services are simply too valuable.

Danger is inherent in coral reef life. Some predators rely on stealth and camouflage, their dark or mottled colours enabling them to blend into the shadows. Others such as the sleek, silvery jacks sometimes hunt in packs, but rely on speed to catch their victims. In this world defense is key. **Surgeonfish** have spines like tiny scalpels on the base of their tails, which can be flicked out to slash at other fish. **Triggerfish**, shelter in holes or crevices in the reef itself, but if threatened they can raise trigger-like spines on their heads and bellies to lock themselves in place. Triggerfish are also notoriously territorial, standing guard over their nests, so watch out for these species if they are hovering over shallow depressions in sandy patches!

Parrotfish are another critical part of life on the reef. They use their distinctive beaks to bite pieces out of the reef rock. They digest the algae but expel clouds of the indigestible rock skeleton, as they swim through the water. This process turns much what was once coral into sand. Think of that as you walk along the wonderful white-sand beaches. Most of them are built through the digestive action of a fish!



Emperor angelfish - *Pomacanthus imperator*

This stunning species is unmistakable, both as an adult and a juvenile

Diet: Omnivorous, preference for sponges and algae

Max size: c.40cm **Lifespan** 14 years

Moorish Idol - *Zanclus cornutus*

Diet: Small encrusting animals (tunicates and coral polyps)

Max size: 23cm

Titan triggerfish - *Balistoides viridescens*

Diet: sea urchins, coral, crabs and other crustaceans, molluscs and tube worms

Max size: 75cm

Powder blue surgeonfish - *Acanthurus leucosternon*

Diet: Herbivorous, benthic algae.

Max size: 23cm

Parrotfish - *Scarinae*

Diet: Algae and sponge grazers

Max size: On average between 30 - 50cm, some individuals up to 1.3m (green humphead parrotfish)

Cleaner wrasse - *Labroides dimidiatus*

Diet: crustacean ectoparasites and mucus of other fishes

Max size: 14cm **Lifespan:** 4 years

Racoon butterflyfish - *Chaetodon lunula*

Diet: Nudibranchs, tubeworm tentacles and algae

Max size: 20cm **Lifespan:** 7 years



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