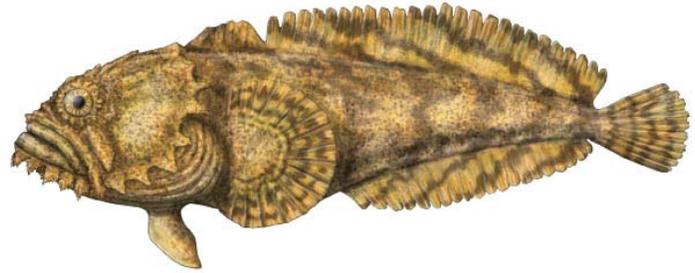


**This Month**

# Oyster Toadfish

**Colloquial Nickname:** Toadfish, dowdy  
**Scientific name:** *Opsanus tau*



**Field Markings:** Blotchy, olive brown body, fading to pale below. Capable of changing color to match the bottom.

**Size:** Up to 12 inches long

**Habitat:** Sandy, rocky and muddy bottoms on oyster reefs, shallow water, among eelgrass, hollows or dens.

**Seasonal Appearance:** Year-round

## DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

The oyster toadfish is an unusually shaped, large-headed fish that typically lives along oyster reefs and vegetated muddy bottoms. It has scaleless skin and is covered instead with a thick mucus and, possibly, warts, making it easy to understand why it earns the name “oyster toadfish.” Out of water, this fish feels soft and squishy.

Toadfish have a tapered body with a plump belly and a large, flat head that tapers to a thin tail. Its nose is rounded, and it has a tremendous mouth with large, blunt teeth. Its lips are surrounded by thick, fleshy flaps of skin. There are two sharp spines, located on the gill covers, which the toadfish uses for defense. The ventral fins are located underneath its throat in front of the gill openings; the fins stretch out like fans.

A voracious omnivore, the oyster toadfish feeds aggressively on oysters, worms, shrimp, amphipods, crabs, mollusks, squid and small fish. The strong teeth and jaws of the toadfish are



capable of crushing the hard shells of mollusks and are often used to fight with other oyster toadfish. They snap viciously when caught.

Oyster toadfish are quite vocal. To attract a female during spawning season, the male emits a loud foghorn-like call that can be heard underwater for great distances. When handled out of the water, toadfish grunt. The female lays her eggs in crevices, under submerged wood and, sometimes, even in discarded tin cans. After fertilization, the female leaves the male to guard the nest. For about a month, the male cleans the nest and uses his fins to fan the eggs until they hatch. The male continues guarding the young for three to four weeks after the eggs hatched, keeping watch over the juveniles even after they become free swimmers.

## RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE

Oyster toadfish appear to be well-adapted to living among pollution and litter and have been found inside tires or cans submerged in the Bay.

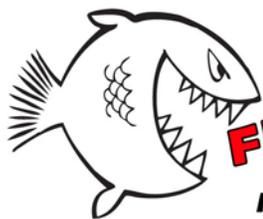
Because of its size, sensitivity to pollution and ability to live out of the water for a long time, the oyster toadfish serves as an important animal for marine research.

### HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY

RISAA members can purchase their own copy of *The Uncommon Guide To Common Life on Narragansett Bay* for \$15 from the RISAA Merchandise Committee. Stop by the committee table at any monthly RISAA meeting.



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