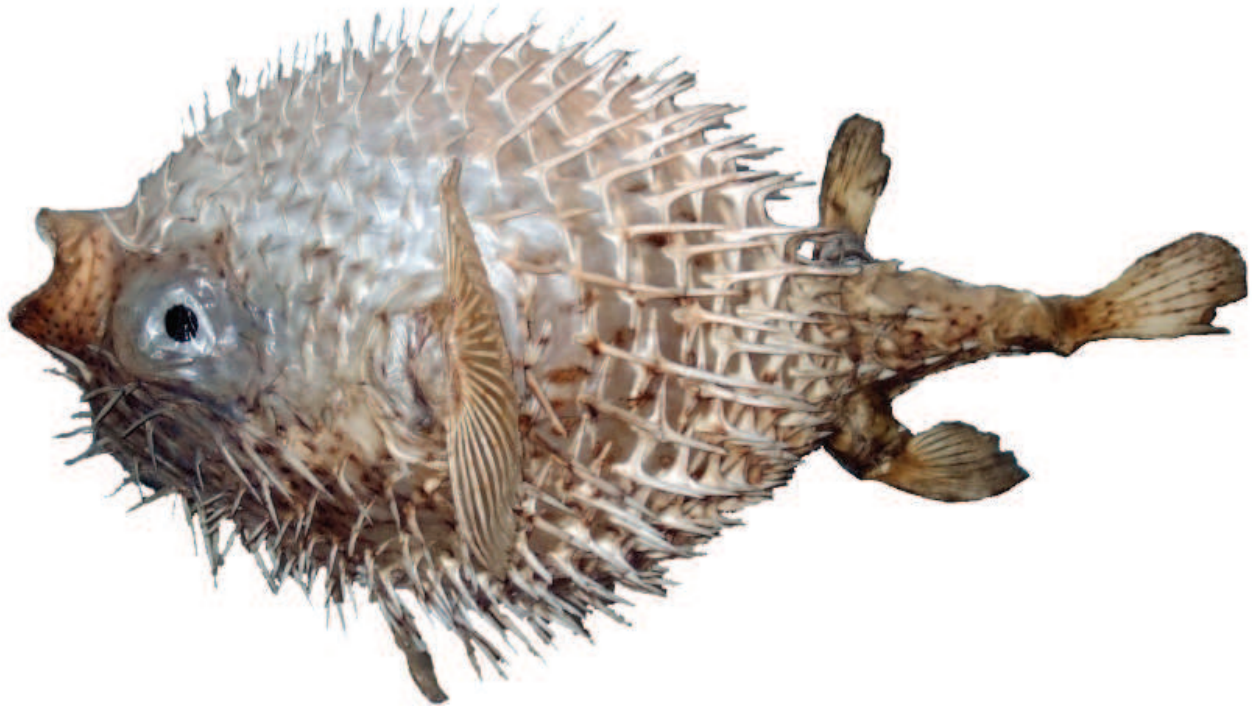


YZC Animal of the Month, January 2014

Spotted Porcupinefish

Diodon hystrix



No, this is not a spiny football but a fish – a porcupinefish (no points for guessing how it got its name!). Porcupinefish, and their relatives the pufferfish, have a rather wonderful response to predators – “you try and eat me and I will just get bigger. A lot bigger.” And, in the case of the porcupinefish, “and I have lots of spikes sticking out of me making me really difficult to swallow”. Porcupinefish are able to inflate to 3 times their normal size through swallowing a huge volume of water or air – an act that can force them to swim upside down.

Their skin has specializations to cope with being stretched like that – collagen fibres that give it strength and elasticity.

Porcupinefish are found in tropical seas, usually in coral reefs and mangroves. They are most active at night, when they swim around finding food – generally shellfish and sea urchins which they are able to break into using their strong teeth fused together to make a beak. They live alone and can reach lengths of 91cm (although our specimen is only around half that size).