

PORCUPINEFISH PREDATION AT WOODY ISLAND, PITTWATER

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In August 1990 Mr G. Prestedge of Midway Point, advised of a number of skins of porcupinefish well above the tide line on Woody Island, approximately 15 km. east of Hobart.

Shortly afterwards Mr Prestedge took me in his boat to the island where we had no difficulty in finding a number of skins, some but not all having been turned inside out. As reported, all were some distance above the water line and all were under trees. There was no doubt in my mind that the fish had been caught by White-breasted Sea Eagles which visit the island fairly frequently, and taken to a convenient perch to be eaten at leisure.

Three species of porcupinefish are recorded from Tasmania. The largest is only rarely found in shallow waters and has very long spines. Although a specimen was not collected, there seems no doubt that the observed fish were not of this species as their spines are too long and surrounding waters are all shallow. The Three-barred porcupinefish is common in tropical and subtropical water but only recorded from Flinders Island in Tasmania. It has well-defined dark vertical banding which was not evident on the specimens seen. The third Tasmanian species, evidently the one seen, is known as the Globefish. It is of shorter length than the two previous species, has quite long spines and frequents sheltered rocky reefs in shallow water.

The flesh of all of the above fish is claimed to be poisonous. This would tend to conflict with the evidence that, as some of the fish had been turned inside out, eagles or other animals such as water rats had eaten them. Alternatively, it is possible that the flesh loses its toxicity after death or that the predator has some way of neutralising the poison before digesting it.

