

Tumor rumor

The editor received a brief, unsigned note that pointed out an error two issues ago in the article entitled "Persistent expression of tumors in Lake of the Arbuckles gizzard shad" (19[1]:34-36). The note refuted the claim that "cancer in fishes has been previously reported at various locations in North America ... but never in a national park." It asserted that gray (mangrove) snapper with tumors have been recorded in the waters of Dry Tortugas National Park.

Dr. Robert Werner, Director of the Department of Laboratory Animal Resources at Florida State University, has been studying fish with tumors and other abnormalities from south Florida waters, and elaborated on the facts in an e-mail exchange with the editor. Dr. Werner reports that subcutaneous tumors, primarily single, but occasionally multiple, have been tentatively diagnosed as neurofibroma in gray snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*) from Florida waters, including those of Dry Tortugas National Park. A moat surrounding Fort Jefferson in the national park that harbors a semi-isolated population of the fish species was monitored every six months from August 1995 to August 1997. The tumor prevalence at this site ranged from 0 - 4.9% over the three-year study.

Dr. Michael Schmale of the University of Miami's Rosenstiel



School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences also participated in the study. He reports that

gray snapper with tumors have also been documented in Biscayne National Park. While this study has not been published in a scientific journal, Schmale has published in several journals about his work on cancerous tumors in bicolor damselfish that were collected in both Biscayne and Dry Tortugas National Parks¹. Regarding the geographical error in *Park Science*, Schmale stressed that “oftentimes scientists do not realize which published studies were carried out in national parks because [this information] is not normally mentioned in the professional literature.”

¹For example: Schmale, M. C. 1991. Prevalence and distribution patterns of tumors in bicolor damselfish (*Pomacentrus partitus*) on south Florida reefs. Marine Biology 109:203-12.