

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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# Reproductive Strategies

## Animal Profile:

### **BLUE-HEADED WRASSE**

*(Thalassoma bifasciatum)*



*Adult male Blue-Headed Wrasse*

Many animals are born male or female and stay that way for the rest of their lives.

Not so with the blue-headed wrasse, a tropical fish that darts about amongst the corals and sponges in shallow Caribbean waters. Females of this fish can completely transform into males when the conditions are right.

Blue-headed wrasses, like many reef fish, are small and brilliantly colored. Most of them - young males and females - are yellow and sport a greenish-black stripe on their sides. The others - the few, the proud, and the powerful - are older males with showy blue heads, green bodies, and thick black and white stripes around their collars.

Big blue-headed males defend territories around the reefs, where they strut their stuff until the smaller yellow females find them attractive. When this happens, the female swims with the male and spawns (releases her eggs). The male quickly fertilizes them with his sperm before they float away into the ocean. Blue-headed males can mate with as many as 100 females per day!



Virginia O. Skinner

*Adult female or young male Blue-Headed Wrasse*

Of course, these big males can lose their territories because of nasty little things like death and rivalry. When that happens, the largest yellow female in the area may morph into a blue-headed male and begin defending a territory. So, some of the blue-headed males were born male, while others were born female.

For the females that transform into males, this is a great deal. They can get a lot of their genes into the next generation by laying eggs when they are younger, and then fertilizing eggs as males when they're older.



Virginia O. Skinner

*Juvenile Blue-Headed Wrasse*