

Distribution and Feeding Habits of Larval Nassau Grouper and Three Other Winter-Spawning Epinepheline Species

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ABSTRACT

Ichthyoplankton and channel net samples collected from Exuma Sound during January-February, 1991 contained approximately 600 larval Epinepheline groupers. Vertically-stratified tows were made during day and night along an offshore transect perpendicular to the shore, and channel nets were fished in tidal passes between islands at the edge of Exuma Sound. Larval Nassau grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*) were the most common species taken, and were occasionally very abundant in January. Lower numbers of larval coney (*E. fulvus*) were present in January, and rock hind (*E. adscensionis*) were collected in February. A few red hind (*E. guttatus*) were taken throughout the study period. Onshore/offshore, vertical and small scale spatial patterns will be discussed, as will be the feeding biology and growth rates of the specimens.