

Education Department  
Waikīkī Aquarium  
University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa



WAIKIKI  
AQUARIUM  
University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa

## MARINE LIFE PROFILE: THE DAMSELFISHES

Scientific name: Family Pomacentridae  
Hawaiian name: varies with species  
Distribution: worldwide in tropical and temperate waters  
Size: varies with species, from  
1.5 to 10 inches (4-25 cm)  
Diet: varies with species

Damselfishes, or demoiselles as they are sometimes known, are among the most abundant and varied of reef fish families. They are so characteristic of reef environments that one marine life author and photographer remarked, "a coral reef without damselfishes would seem empty."

Worldwide, in tropical and warm temperate waters, there are over 300 damselfish species; more than 15 species are reported from Hawai‘i. These small (1.5 inches/4 cm) to medium-sized (10 inches/25 cm) fishes are typical in shallow water habitats -- look for their husky oval profile when tidepooling, snorkeling or diving. Many damselfishes stand out because of their bold colors of bright blue, orange, or dramatic black and white. Other species are less conspicuously colored, but make up for it with bold behaviors, facing-off divers who enter their territory.

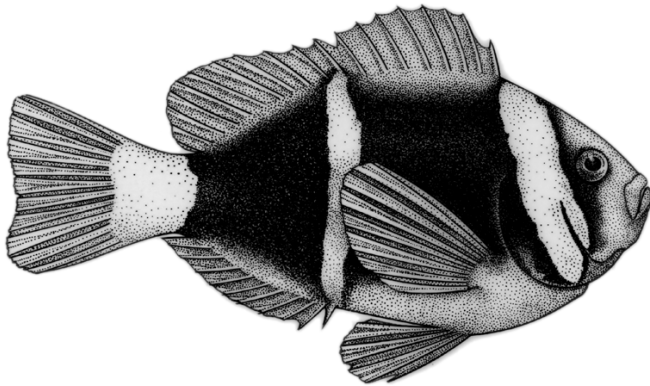
Algae-eating damselfishes hug the bottom on rocky, surge-swept shores and individuals defend (or even weed) their territories of short seaweed turf. In contrast, clouds of plankton-feeding damselfishes hover above coral heads on quieter reefs, plucking minute prey from the water column. Anemonefish, found only in the western tropical Pacific, have a specialized habitat -- certain species of large sea anemones that serve as host and territory. They feed on zooplankton and algae.

### Classification:

Kingdom Animalia  
Phylum Chordata, Subphylum Vertebrata  
Class Osteichthyes  
Order Perciformes  
Family Pomacentridae

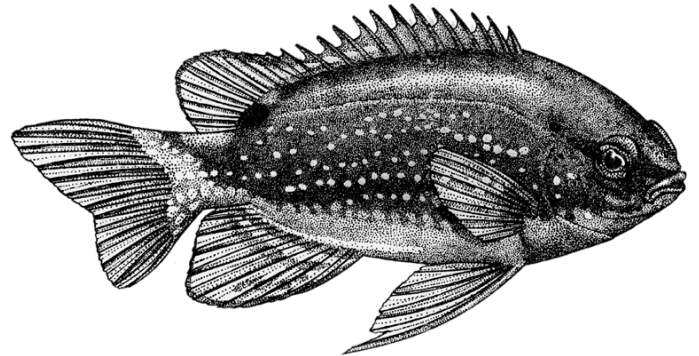
**DAMSELFISHES**  
**Family Pomacentridae**

**ANEMONEFISH**  
*Amphiprion* sp.



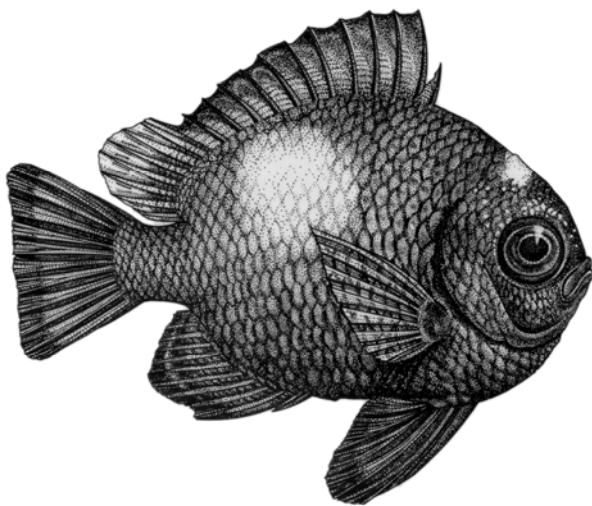
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**BLUE-DEVIL DAMSELFISH**  
*Chrysiptera cyanea*



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**HAWAIIAN DASCYLLUS**  
**‘ālo‘ilo**  
*Dascyllus albisella*



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**BLACKSPOT SERGEANT**  
**kūpīpī**  
*Abudefduf sordidus*

