Life Under Water
Ember Parrotfish

This fish gets its name from its body colouration and its beak like mouth. It belongs to the family Scaridae which has 10 genera and over 90 species. The Ember Parrotfish (Scarus rubroviridis) is also known as ‘Bicolour Parrotfish’ and ‘Red-lip Parrotfish’. This marine, reef-associated fish occurs at depths of one to 36 meters and is commonly found in the tropical Indo-Pacific region. The fish feeds by rasping algae from corals and other rocky surfaces and, hence, is called a biorher. It plays an important role in the health of coral reefs. The parrotfishes exhibit some of the most complex and unusual reproductive strategies. Ember Parrotfish shows sequential hermaphroditism which means it changes its sex at some point of its life. Juvenile Ember Parrotfish has undifferentiated sex. As it grows, at the body length of about 32 cm and at about 2.6 years of age, it matures into a female who is reddish brown in colour. It remains as a female for quite some time and then when it grows further, at the body length of about 37 cm and at about 13 years of age, it changes its sex into a male which looks as seen in the photograph accompanying this article. Many individuals show this protogynous (female first) sequential hermaphroditism; however, some remain females throughout their lives. The fish lives up to about 20 years. Though this interesting fish is present abundantly over a wide geographic area and used as an ornamental fish in aquaria, much of its biology remains unexplored. The current photograph of a male Ember Parrotfish was taken at the reefs around Netrani islands, off the coast of Murudeshwar, Karnataka, India.

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