

MEET THE PARROTFISH (UHU): NATURE'S REEF KEEPERS

CONSERVATION CONNECTION NEWSLETTER:
JUNE 2025

HABITAT

Coral reefs, rocky shores, seagrass meadows

JAWS

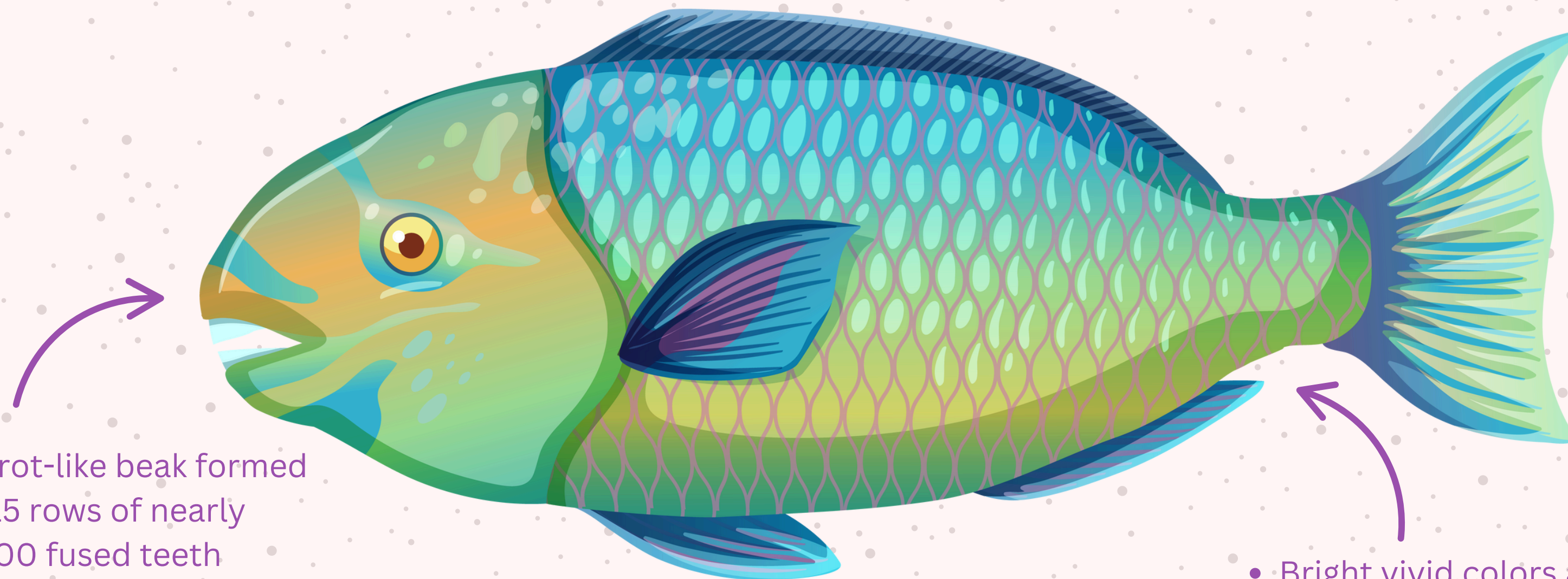
- Parrotfish teeth are one of the toughest bio-minerals in the animal kingdom
- Use teeth to scrape or bite through coral heads
- Teeth grow throughout their lives and are constantly replaced when they wear out

POOPING MACHINES

- One parrot fish produces from 200 - 1,000 pounds of sand every year
- Over 80% of the sand produced in coral atolls is parrotfish poop

SOCIAL HABITS

- Breeding harems (groups of few females defended by one male)
- Often form large multi-species schools with other herbivores



- Parrot-like beak formed of 15 rows of nearly 1,000 fused teeth
- Hard molar-like teeth in the throat grind coral into sand

- Bright vivid colors as they mature or change sex
- Large thick scales cover their bodies that, in some species, are strong enough to stop a spear

THREATS

- Pollution
- Overfishing
- Habitat destruction
- Global warming
- Overharvesting - especially since parrotfish are protogynous hermaphrodites*. Removing large males can hurt reproduction

*Protogynous hermaphrodites are animals, specifically fish, that are born female but can change sex to become male at some point in their life.

EAT

Mostly algae growing on or within dead coral

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

By scraping algae off dead coral, they create new spaces for young coral to settle, which helps with reef recovery.

HAWAI'I

Hawai'i hosts seven species of parrotfish, three of which are endemic. In Hawaiian culture, Uhu are not only ecologically important—they're also woven into traditional practices and stories. But today, their populations are at risk from overfishing.

Conservation & Fishing Rules:

- In some areas there are specific rules on size and quantity limits for Uhu species.
- It is illegal to use certain gear types (e.g., scuba spearfishing) in designated areas.
- Community-led rules (like those from Kapu Zones) help give fish populations a chance to recover.

✦ Always check with the [Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources \(DAR\)](#) before fishing for Uhu. Support local conservation efforts and fish responsibly.

BERMUDA

In Bermuda, there are 14 different species of parrotfish. They are completely protected due to their critical role in reef health.

Fishing Ban:

- Parrotfish have been legally protected since 1993.
- It is an offence under the Fisheries Act 1972 to take, kill and/or sell parrotfish.
- This protection has helped reef systems remain some of the healthiest in the Atlantic.

✦ If you see any suspicious fishing activity, report it to:

- Fisheries Wardens at **535-4615**
- Bermuda Coast Guard at **294-0610**
- Bermuda Aquarium Museum & Zoo (BAMZ) at **293-2727**
- Bermuda Police Service at **211**
- [Names and Contacts for Reporting Animal Strandings and Marine Environmental Emergencies](#)

Resources:

[National Marine Sanctuary Foundation](#)

[Monterey Bay Aquarium](#)

[Uhu Hawaiian culture](#)

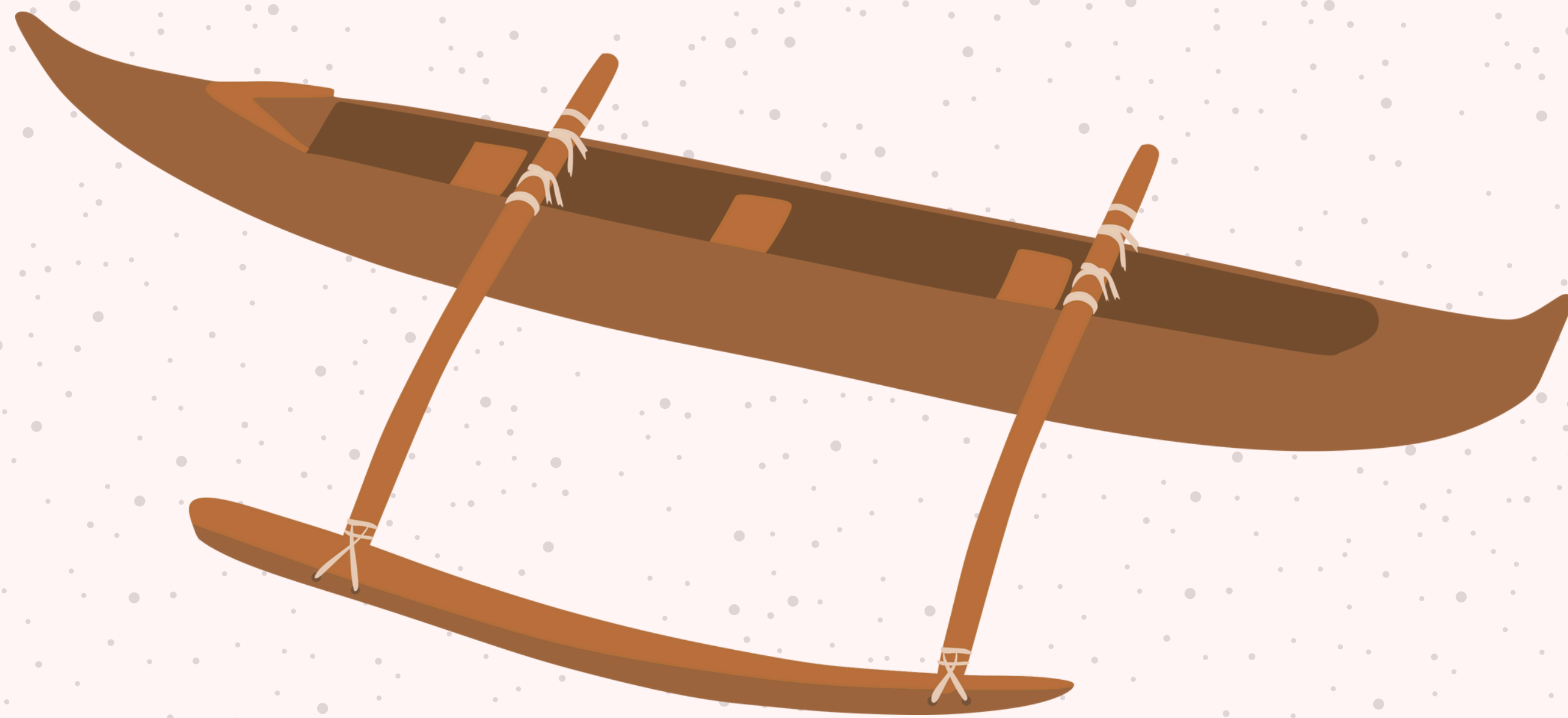
[Waikiki Aquarium](#)

[Government of Bermuda Parrotfish](#)



LEGEND OF PUNIAKAI'A AND UHUMĀKA'IKA'I, THE PARENT OF ALL FISHES

This is the story of a man named Puniakai'a and his giant parrotfish who was the parent to all other fishes, Uhumāka'ika'i.



In the story of Puniakai'a, he catches a small uhu and takes him home to care for him. The uhu grows to be a very large fish and was given the name Uhumāka'ika'i- this was the parent of all fishes. Puniakai'a returns the uhu to the ocean and when there is a call for everyone to go fishing, Puniakai'a calls upon his pet uhu to bring the fish. Uhumāka'ika'i obeys, providing enough fish for everyone including the pigs and dogs.