

Health & Environment

## Finding Dory in Hong Kong reef just one of the surprises for marine conservation group Bloom Association as they spot 22 new species in city's waters

- Group has been conducting underwater survey since 2014, using volunteers to track city's fish
- Programme's director hails Hong Kong's rich biodiversity as he releases findings



Linda Lew

Published: 7:56pm, 26 Jun, 2019 ▾



This blue tang was spotted in Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park and its behaviour suggested it had been in human captivity. Credit: Bloom Association

Hong Kong's surrounding seas may not be as bland and lifeless as some may think after an NGO announced it discovered 22 reef fish species that have not been spotted near the city before.

Bloom Association is dedicated to marine conservation, and has been

conducting a scuba diving survey of Hong Kong's reef fish, species of marine organisms which dwell close or in coral reefs, since 2014 through a series of diving expeditions in the seas to the east of the city.

"Hong Kong may be a small place... but its biodiversity is rich," said Stan Shea, the marine programme director of Bloom Hong Kong.

And while the city's waters make up 0.03 per cent of the South China Sea, they host more than a quarter of the marine life recorded in Chinese territorial waters, according to a 2016 study by Hong Kong University.



The Hairtail benny is a sea snake that is quick to burrow into sand. Credit: Caron Wong

Several of the new to Hong Kong species are small and hide in the reefs or burrows on the ocean floor, making detection difficult. For example, the Hairtail blenny, a sea snake, is quick to burrow into sand.

More than 100 volunteer divers and photographers have helped to spot the marine creatures for the survey.

One of the new finds is the false cleanerfish, a species with a long body and a distinctive black stripe. It mimics its namesake, which cleans dead skin or parasites off other fish.

Kamy Leung, a volunteer diver and photographer, spotted the false cleanerfish close to Castle Rock, near Beaufort Island, south of Hong Kong.

“The fish was playing around with another cleanerfish instead of following other fishes to clean them. I thought that was strange so I kept taking photos of it,” Leung said.

Cleanerfish and its mimic are distinguished by the location of their mouths, with the false cleanerfish’s mouth being lower.

The team also encountered exotic fish likely to have been released by humans, either as a religious act of mercy, or abandonment. A blue tang, the species of the titular fish in the animated movie *Finding Dory*, was spotted in Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park. It was not afraid of humans, suggesting it may have been fed before.

Bloom Association, which was founded by French environmentalist Claire Nouvian in 2004, said it will report the findings to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department.

It has also built a website, [114 degrees E Reef Fish](#), with data from the survey, and wants the public to report any new finds. The association hopes the website will educate residents on marine life and promote conservation.