

by Richard N. Uchida

**Valid name** *Myripristis berndti* Jordan and Evermann 1905 (Fig. 48)  
**Synonymy** *Myripristis murdjan* Randall 1973  
*Myripristis amaenus* Fournanoir and Laboute 1976  
 (from Randall and Guézé 1981)

**Common and vernacular names** Red squirrelfish; mempachi; uu

### Distribution

Common in the main islands; captured from Nihoa to Kure Atoll in the NWHI.

### Distinguishing characteristics

D. X-I, 14; IV, 12; P1. II, 15; P2. I, 7; LLs. 28-31; Gr. 11-14 + 23-28 (Randall and Guézé 1981). Body elongate, rather deep, compressed; head large; snout blunt, convex, its width about twice its length; eyes large, high, upper rims hardly impinging on upper profile of head; eye diameter slightly less than posterior part of head; mouth large, oblique; mandible of adult slightly projecting when closed; maxillary not reaching posteriorly to below posterior margin of eye; several enlarged and blunt teeth on outer front edge of jaws; teeth fine, in broad bands on jaws, vomer, and palatines. Tongue thick, pointed, and in front (Jordan and Evermann 1905).

Lips thick, fleshy; nostrils close together, bones on head finely serrated; opercle with well-developed spine; gill opening large; gill rakers long, fine; caudal forked, pectorals small; scales large, ctenoid, deep on middle of side; lateral line obliquely curved at first, then running obliquely down to base of caudal (Jordan and Evermann 1905).

Color in life red, center of each scale pale, a black bar across opercular region down to axil of pectoral; spines in first dorsal pink and membranes of basal half translucent, upper half orange-yellow; soft dorsal, anal, and caudal crimson but first rays white in each; pectoral red (Jordan and Evermann 1905).

### Life history

Hiding in holes and cracks in reefs primarily in the submerge zone, uu are a nocturnal planktivores feeding mainly on crab megalops and other crustaceans (Gosline 1965; Hobson 1972, 1974). Apparently fishes form an insignificant part of the diet for members of the squirrelfish family (Randall 1967). They emerge from their daytime reef shelter about 30 min after sunset and aggregate in the water column above the reef (Hobson 1972, 1974). Almost immediately after aggregating, they migrate offshore, possibly to the drop-off zone into deep water, which is a major feeding ground for diurnal planktivores (Hobson 1972). The offshore movement may be obscured because many individuals remain over the inshore reef. However, since there are consistently fewer uu over the reefs when there is no moon than on moonlit nights many may be moving offshore, especially on dark nights. About 40 min before sunrise, uu begin to reassemble over the reef and all the individuals take cover within 10 min (Hobson 1974).

*Myripristis* spp. hunt prey in the water column. This feeding habit is reflected by the sharply upturned mouth, a feature which is highly adapted for feeding on plankton (Hobson 1974). Studies on *M. leiognathus* (Hobson 1965, 1968) and *M. jacobus* (Randall 1980) indicate similar forage patterns.

### Gear and catch

Uu are caught mainly by handline; smaller quantities are landed by net and spear fishermen. The species is also taken by trolling at night in relatively shallow water.

Highly prized as a food fish, *Myripristis* spp. (all species) are target species of not only commercial but also recreational fishermen. The State landings of *Myripristis* spp. in 1961-69 fluctuated over a relatively narrow range from 4,330 to 7,449 kg and averaged 5,830 kg. From 1970 through 1976, the catches rose slightly varying between 7,433 and 11,090 kg averaging 9,140 kg. In 1977-79, however, catches rose substantially and landings reached 21,003 kg in 1977, 23,546 kg in 1978, and 20,469 kg in 1979, averaging 21,673 kg. Landings increased in 1977 when speared fish were allowed to be sold.

There is no fishery for uu in the NWHI.

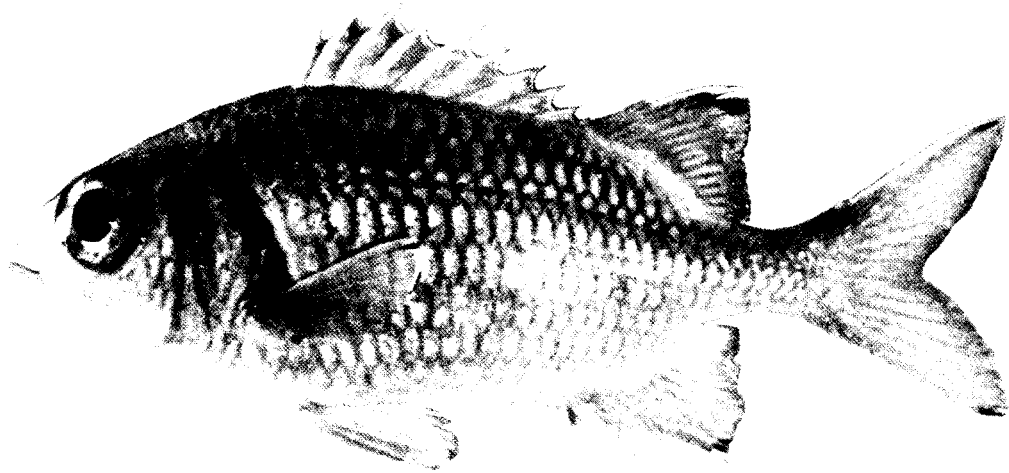


Figure 48.—*Myripristis berndti*.