Gene variations cause spiny sea bass to look dramatically different as babies and adults

Among divers and marine biologists, it's common knowledge that ocean fish lead double lives. Like birds and butterflies, their young often look nothing like the adults, but unlike birds and butterflies, it is the young that are often more beautiful and ornate than their parents. I think this bit of natural history remains largely unknown to the wider world, though.

You can appreciate how extraordinarily hard it was to link larval fish to adults prior to the advent of DNA sequencing technology. Even with the ability to peek at their DNA, you must sometimes still open your eyes and get a little bit lucky to make a match. In fact, even with DNA barcoding, the Smithsonian scientists write, "… species identifications of larvae of most marine fishes remain elusive." Which is kind of mind-blowing, when you think about it. Because it means for most of the fish in the ocean, we still don't know what their young look like. We're not talking about microbes or copepods here. We're talking about the largest, most conspicuous, and "charismatic" creatures in the ocean.

Read the full, original story: Spiny Baby Sea Bass Illustrates Surprising Physiques of Young Fish