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ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE TRIPLETAIL, *LOBOTES SURINAMENSIS*
(BLOCH, 1790) (OSTEICHTHYES: LOBOTIDAE), OFF THE COAST
OF ALGERIA (SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN)

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper, their authors report on a new record of the Tripletail, Lobotes surinamensis (Bloch, 1790), off the coast of Algeria (southern Mediterranean). A brief description of the specimen and comment on both occurrence and distribution of the species in the Mediterranean is given.

Key words: teleost, Lobotidae, *Lobotes surinamensis*, distribution, Algeria, Mediterranean

TESTIMONIANZA DI PESCE FOGLIA, *LOBOTES SURINAMENSIS* (BLOCH, 1790)
(OSTEITTI: LOBOTIDAE) AL LARGO DELLA COSTA DELL'ALGERIA
(MEDITERRANEO MERIDIONALE)

SINTESI

Gli autori riportano una nuova testimonianza di pesce foglia, Lobotes surinamensis (Bloch, 1790), al largo della costa algerina (Mediterraneo meridionale). L'articolo fornisce una breve descrizione dell'esemplare e commenta sia il ritrovamento che la distribuzione della specie in Mediterraneo.

Parole chiave: Teleostei, Lobotidae, *Lobotes surinamensis*, distribuzione, Algeria, Mediterraneo

INTRODUCTION

The Tripletail *Lobotes surinamensis* (Bloch, 1790) is a cosmopolitan species found in all warm seas. The first written record of this teleost fish, as far as the Mediterranean is concerned, comes from Sicilian waters (Doderlein, 1875). Its presence in the Mediterranean has been since then noted by several authors, Ben-Tuvia (1953) and Colani (1996, 1997) in Israeli waters, Bini (1968) off Calabria, Italy and Tortonese (1975) off Rhodes, Greece, Turkey and Lebanon. Although *L. surinamensis* occurs in many places, it is still considered a rather rare species. Despite its wide distribution, it was not mentioned in the comprehensive studies by Dieuzeide (1953) carried out in coastal waters of Algeria. The first record from Tunisian coastal waters was made by Bradai (2000). An unsubstantiated record of this species was presented by Mr. Ali Messaoudi with a specimen of *L. surinamensis* presumably caught off Algiers (Anonymous, 1993). A recent survey conducted at some fishery sites along the Algerian coast revealed another specimen of this species.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

On 15 December 2002, a Tripletail was observed at the fish market of Algiers; it was caught by pelagic gill-net at a depth between 10 and 15 metres, off Annaba, city located in eastern Algeria, 90 km west to the Tunisia border (Fig. 1). The specimen was a female, 450-mm total length and weighing 4500 g. As the fishermen sold it immediately, we were unfortunately unable to preserve and include it in the Ichthyological Collection of the Algiers University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Morphometric measurements and meristic characteristics of this specimen are given in Table 1.

Body compressed, deep oval-shaped. Upper profile of head concave. Mouth oblique with protractible upper jaw. Jaws have bands of villiform teeth with rows of conical teeth on the outer edge. Preoperculum margin sharply serrated. Pelvic fin larger than pectoral. Posterior portions of the dorsal and anal rays rounded and opposite each other; together with the rounded caudal fin, they form a three-lobed caudal fin. Posterior part of dorsal and anal fins scaled. Colour brownish with differently shaped faded blotches and spots. Posterior margin of caudal fin yellow.

According to the authors, the Tripletail *L. surinamensis* lives solitary or in pairs. It feeds mainly on invertebrates and fish. This species is known for its strange behaviour; it floats motionless on its side on the surface of the water, for reasons still unknown. Schmid & Randall (1997) noted this behaviour pattern serves the fish

to camouflage against its predators and while placing itself in a good position to surreptitiously drawing closer to its prey. This probably explains why captures of this fish are rarely mentioned.

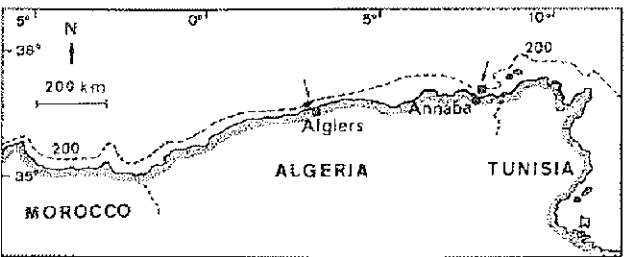


Fig. 1: Map of the Maghrebine shore showing the Algerian capture sites of *Lobotes surinamensis* (arrow pointing at the black star: first record; arrow pointing at the black square: second record).

Sl. 1: Zemljevid magrebske obale z oznakami lokacij v alžirskih vodah, kjer je bila ujeta vrsta *Lobotes surinamensis* (črna zvezdica: prvi zapis; črni kvadratik: drugi zapis).

Tab. 1: Morphometric measurements (in mm) and meristic counts of the specimen of *Lobotes surinamensis*.

Tab. 1: Morfometrični (v mm) in meristični podatki o primerku vrste *Lobotes surinamensis*.

Total length	450
Fork length	370
Space between tip of snout to caudal fin origin	361
Head length	60
Interorbital space	24
Space between tip of snout to pectoral fin origin	66
Space between tip of snout to dorsal fin origin	73
Space between tip of snout to pelvic fin origin	64
Space between tip of snout to anal fin origin	280
Space between snout and vent	310
Dorsal fin length	300
Pectoral fin length	70
Pelvic fin length	95
Anal fin length	90
Caudal fin length	45
Caudal fin width	43
Eviscerated mass in grammes	4500
Pelvic fin rays	1 + 5
Dorsal fin rays	XII + 16
Anal fin rays	III + 15
Pectoral fin rays	12
Caudal fin rays	18
Ctenoid scales on tail	10

Fischer *et al.* (1981) reported the species along the eastern tropical Atlantic shore from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Gulf of Guinea. However, they noted that the species was captured only occasionally and that it seemed not to be very abundant in the area in spite of its commercial value, as its flesh is appreciated by local consumers. The species was reported off Guinea-Bissau (Sanchès, 1991), but not off Senegal (Cadenat, 1951; Séret & Opic, 1990; N'Dao, 1997; Diatta *et al.*, 2002). The information recently provided by fishermen, however, suggests its possible occurrence off the Cape Verde Peninsula. Moreover, *L. surinamensis* has not been reported from waters off Mauritania (Maigret & Ly, 1984).

Consequently, a progressive Mediterranean invasion by this species from the eastern Atlantic, as was the case with other fish species (Massuti & Stefanescu, 1993; Pizzicori *et al.*, 2000; Quignard & Tomasini, 2000; Hemida *et al.*, 2002), remains speculative.

In the Mediterranean, Tortonese (1975) noted that the Tripletail was occasionally captured off Sicily (Doderlein, 1875) and Calabria (Bini, 1968). He added that the species was also recorded off Rhodes, Greece, Turkey and Lebanon.

Roux (1986) reported the occurrence of *L. surinamensis* "in the Mediterranean and off Madeira and the Azores" and "elsewhere in all warm seas", but did not refer to any abundance of the species in these areas. Golani (1996, 1997) reported the species from the waters off Israel, and Bradaï (2000) from Tunisian waters.

It is possible that the recent finding of *L. surinamensis* in this area of the southern Mediterranean is due to an increase in the population and possible climatic changes, which led to other changes in intra-Mediterranean fish species distribution (Francour *et al.*, 1994; Quignard & Tomasini, 2000).

Moreover, Quignard & Tomasini (2000) noted: "The discovery of a large number of other species outside their usual area of distribution may be due to an increase of traditional prospection, or to the use of newer techniques..., which allow the exploration of otherwise inaccessible habitat", in agreement with Golani (1996) and Golani & Sonin (1996). This is probably the case of *L. surinamensis* from the Algerian coast, where the information given by fishermen showed that Tripletails are not uncommon in local waters. Captures of specimens are apparently observed throughout the year. A sustainable Tripletail population could be established off the Algerian coast, but identification is needed in order to confirm this opinion.

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O POJAVLJANJU VRSTE *LOBOTES SURINAMENSIS* (BLOCH, 1790) (OSTEICHTHYES: LOBOTIDAE) V ALŽIRSKIH VODAH (JUŽNO SREDOZEMLJE)

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POVZETEK

Avtorji članka nas seznajajo z novim podatki o pojavljanju vrste *Lobotes surinamensis* (Bloch, 1790) iz obrežnih alžirskih voda (južno Sredozemlje). V članku opisujejo to sicer redko ribjo vrsto in razpravljajo tako o njenem pojavljanju kot razširjenosti v Sredozemskem morju.

Ključne besede: teleost, Lobotidae, *Lobotes surinamensis*, razširjenost, Alžirija, Sredozemlje

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