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OCCURRENCE OF THE RARE DRIFTFISH *CUBICEPS GRACILIS* (NOMEIDAE) FROM THE ALGERIAN COAST (SOUTHWESTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA)

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ABSTRACT

The authors report the capture of a specimen of driftfish, *Cubiceps gracilis*, from the Algerian coast. The present specimen was a female measuring 655 mm in total length (TL) and weighing 1580 g in total body weight. Its description includes some morphometric measurements and meristic counts. This is the first specimen of the species to have been captured in at least 50 years, confirming that it is a rare species in this area. *C. gracilis* is an oceanic epipelagic and mesopelagic species generally inhabiting deep bottoms, and is poorly exploited, due also to its low economic value.

Key words: *Cubiceps gracilis*, Mediterranean Sea, distribution, habitat, description

PRESenza DEL RARO CENTROLOFO ALALUNGA *CUBICEPS GRACILIS* (NOMEIDAE) LUNGO LA COSTA ALGERINA (MEDITERRANEO SUD-OCCIDENTALE)

SINTESI

Gli autori riportano la cattura di un esemplare di centrolofo alalunga, *Cubiceps gracilis* lungo la costa algerina. Si tratta di una femmina che misurava 655 mm di lunghezza totale (TL) e pesava 1580 g di peso corporeo totale. La sua descrizione include alcune misure morfometriche e conteggi meristici. Questo è il primo esemplare della specie ad essere stato catturato negli ultimi 50 anni, a conferma del fatto che si tratta di una specie rara in quest'area. *C. gracilis* è una specie oceanica epipelagica e mesopelagica che generalmente vive su fondali profondi, ed è poco sfruttata, anche a causa del suo basso valore economico.

Parole chiave: *Cubiceps gracilis*, Mediterraneo, distribuzione, habitat, descrizione

INTRODUCTION

The driftfish *Cubiceps gracilis* (Lowe, 1843) is a semi-cosmopolitan species found on both sides of the Atlantic (Agafonova & Kukuev, 1990). It is known from the eastern Atlantic coast of Canada (Scott & Scott, 1988), along the eastern Atlantic shores from northern areas to Mauritania, in waters surrounding the Azores, the Canaries and the Madeira Islands (Haedrich, 1986), and downwards as far as the South African coast (Haedrich, 1990).

C. gracilis had been previously reported as only inhabiting the western Mediterranean Basin (Haedrich, 1986) and being uncommon in the Italian seas (Tortonese, 1975; Relini et al., 2017). However, later records have extended its distribution eastward to the Adriatic Sea (Dulčić, 2002), the Aegean Sea (Filiz et al., 2007) and the Levant Basin (Golani et al., 2006).

The species is unknown in the Maghreb shore, off the Tunisian coast (Bradai et al., 2004; Rafrafi-Nouira, 2016), but it occurs off the Algerian coast (Dieuzeide et al., 1954; Refes et al., 2010) and in the Moroccan coast (Lloris & Rucabado, 1998). Routine monitoring conducted throughout the Algerian coast for the past two decades at least and the assistance of experienced fishermen yielded the information that a specimen of *C. gracilis* had been captured in the area. The present paper gives a short description of the specimen, including main morphometric measurements and meristic counts, as well as commenting on the real status of the species in the area and the wider Mediterranean Sea.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A specimen of *C. gracilis* was captured on 28 April 2009 off Sidi-Fredj, located 30 west of Algiers ($36^{\circ}77' N$ and $02^{\circ}84' E$). It was caught by a bottom

Tab. 1: Morphometric measurements in mm and as a percentages of total length (% TL), meristic counts and weight in gram recorded in the specimen of *Cubiceps gracilis* collected off the Algerian coast.

Tab. 1: Morfometrične meritve v mm in kot delež dolžine telesa (% TL), meristična štetja in teža primerka klateža, ujetega ob alžirski obali.

Morphometric measurements	Size (mm)	Proportion (TL%)
Total length (TL)	655	100.0
Fork length (FL)	565	86.2
Standard length	525	80.1
Body height	160	24.4
Head length	143	21.8
Pre-first dorsal length	175	26.7
Eye diameter	31	4.7
Meristic counts		
First dorsal fin rays		XI
Second dorsal fin rays		I + 26
Anal fin		III + 21
Pectoral fin		23
Number of gill rakers		23
Total body weight (g)		1580

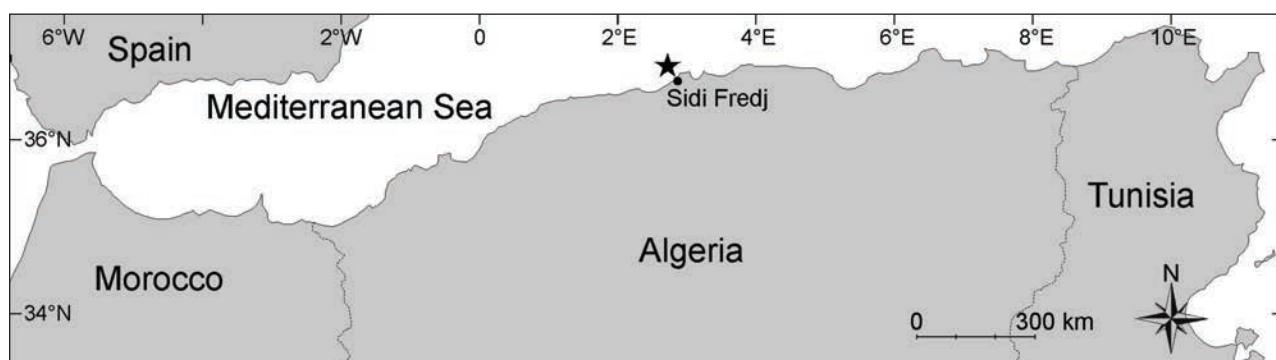


Fig. 1: Map of the Algerian coast with black star indicating the capture site of *Cubiceps gracilis*.
Sl. 1: Zemljovid alžirske obale z označeno lokaliteto ulova klateža (*Cubiceps gracilis*).

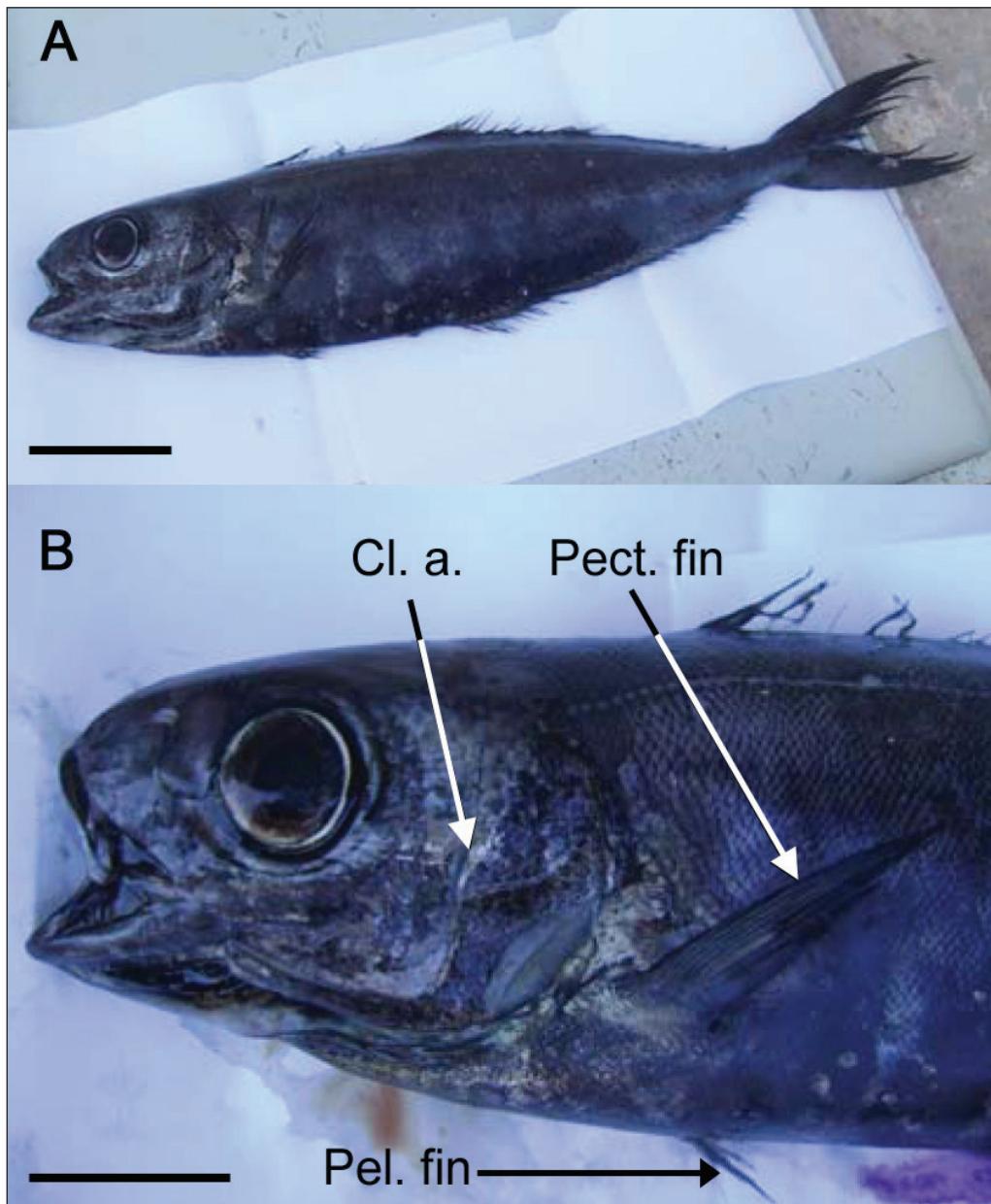


Fig. 2: A. *Cubiceps gracilis* collected from the Algerian coast, scale bar = 100 mm. B. Head of the specimen, Cl. a.: clear area, Pect. fin: pectoral fin, Pel. fin: pelvic fin, scale bar = 50 mm.
Sl. 2: A. Primerek klateža, ulovljen ob alžirski obali, merilo = 100 mm. B. Glava primerka, CL: predel brez lusk, Pect. Fin: prsna plavut, Pel. Fin: trebušna plavut, merilo = 50 mm.

longline at a depth of 150 m approximately, on sandy-rocky substrate. The specimen was measured to the nearest millimetre and weighed to the nearest gram. Morphometric measurements and meristic counts, carried out in the fish market, are presented in Table 1. Unfortunately, the specimen was photographed but not delivered to our laboratory as it was immediately sold by the fisherman who had caught it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present specimen measured 655 mm in total length (TL) and weighed 1580 g in total body weight (Fig. 2A). It was a female identified as *C. gracilis* via the combination of the following main morphological characters: body elongated and compressed, caudal fin forked, head and eye large, mouth small reaching back to the vertical of the

anterior of the eye, small single-row conical teeth in both jaws, pectoral fin long and wing-like, the origin of pelvic fins behind pectoral fin base (Fig. 2B), minute and very deciduous scales covering the body and the head almost to the posterior nostril, colour purple brown, fins blackish, small clear areas on the opercular.

The description of the species, including morphological characters, colour and morphometric measurements (see Tab. 1) is in total accordance with Tortonese (1975), Butler (1979), Haedrich, (1986), Quéro et al. (2003), Golani et al. (2006) and Filiz et al. (2007). This finding confirms the occurrence of *C. gracilis* in Algerian waters.

Haedrich (1986) considered *C. gracilis* to be an oceanic epipelagic and mesopelagic species, however, Golani et al. (2006) noted that there were individuals of this species caught in the Bay of Antalya, Turkey, using deep water bottom trawl. Filiz et al. (2007) reported additional captures of specimens the Aegean Sea, more specifically, Sigacik Bay, Turkey, in fishing grounds located at a depth between 150 and 473 m.

The first records of this species in Algerian waters were of 2 specimens caught in 1950, and a single specimen in 1952, all during the month of April. Refes et al. (2010) speculated on the presence of the species in the area, probably based on

a literature review, but no specimen was available for confirmation. It appears that the occurrence of *C. gracilis* had not been reported from the Algerian Basin for several decades, six at least. Analogously, since the record of the present specimen, to our knowledge, no subsequent capture of the species has been made in the area, where it could therefore be considered as very rare.

Previous reports of the species show that large specimens were mostly captured in deep waters. Those bottoms are in general poorly exploited by fishermen, but the species is not particularly targeted also because it has a low commercial value. Misidentification with other closely related species cannot be totally ruled out either.

Dulčić (2002) notes that large specimens are rather difficult to capture due to their size and agility that enables them to avoid most nets; conversely, our specimen was caught by a bottom long line. Dulčić (2002) concluded that both distribution and status of *C. gracilis* in the Adriatic Sea should be evaluated carefully and on a continuous basis. Relini et al. (2017) pointed to the lack of data on the species despite the fact that it occurs throughout the Italian seas; this lack of data also prevents the determination of the real status of *C. gracilis* in the rest of the Mediterranean Sea, including Algerian waters, where the species is still poorly known.

POJAVLJANJE REDKEGA KLAZEŽA *CUBICEPS GRACILIS* (NOMEIDAE) Z ALŽIRSKE OBALE (JUGOZAHODNO SREDOZEMSKO MORJE)

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POVZETEK

Avtorji poročajo o ulovu primerka klateža (*Cubiceps gracilis*) z alžirske obale. Bila je samica, ki je v dolžino merila 655 mm in tehtala 1580 g telesne teže. Avtorji podajajo nekatere morfometrične meritve in meristična štetja. Gre za prvi primerek, ki je bil ujet v zadnjih petdesetih letih, kar potrjuje dejstvo, da gre za redko vrsto na tem območju. Klatež je oceanska epipelagična in mezopelagična vrsta, ki se običajno pojavlja v večjih globinah in je zaradi majhne ekonomske vrednosti slabo izkoriščena.

Ključne besede: *Cubiceps gracilis*, Sredozemsko morje, razširjenost, habitat, opis

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