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FIRST RECORD OF MOONTAIL BULLSEYE *PRIACANTHUS HAMRUR* (OSTEICHTHYES, PRIACANTHIDAE) FROM THE SYRIAN COAST (EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA)

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ABSTRACT

*On 18 February 2022, a specimen of moontail bullseye *Priacanthus hamrur* (Forsskål, 1775) was caught in a demersal fixed net, at a depth of about 120 m, on muddy bottom. The capture site was at Albassiah, south of the city of Baniyas, 2 km offshore. This paper reports the first record of *P. hamrur* from the Syrian coast and probably the second record from the Mediterranean Sea.*

Key words: *Priacanthus hamrur*, Priacanthidae, measurements, counts, Levant Basin

PRIMO RITROVAMENTO DEL PESCE OCCHIO GROSSO *PRIACANTHUS HAMRUR* (OSTEICHTHYES, PRIACANTHIDAE) LUNGO LA COSTA SIRIANA (MEDITERRANEO ORIENTALE)

SINTESI

*Il 18 febbraio 2022, un esemplare di *Priacanthus hamrur* (Forsskål, 1775) è stato catturato in una rete demersale fissa, a una profondità di circa 120 m, su un fondo fangoso. Il luogo di cattura era Albassiah, a sud della città di Baniyas, 2 km al largo. Questo lavoro riporta il primo ritrovamento di *P. hamrur* lungo la costa siriana e probabilmente il secondo per il Mediterraneo.*

Parole chiave: *Priacanthus hamrur*, Priacanthidae, misure, conteggi, Bacino del Levante

INTRODUCTION

Four priacanthid species have been recorded to date in the Mediterranean Sea, all belonging to the genus *Priacanthus* Oken, 1817: *Priacanthus arenatus* Cuvier, 1829, *P. hamrur* (Forsskål, 1775), *P. prolixus* Starnes, 1988 and *P. sagittarius* Starnes, 1988 (Golani et al., 2021).

Among these species, *P. hamrur* displays the widest distribution range. It has been reported from the Pacific, i.e., from French Polynesia to southern Australia and Japan (Fricke, 1999), from the Indian Ocean, specifically, the Red Sea (Golani et al., 2021), and from the Mediterranean Sea.

The first specimen in the Mediterranean Sea to be identified as *P. hamrur* was collected off Mahdia, central Tunisian coast (Abdelmoleh, 1981), and a second one from Turkish waters (Ergüden et al., 2018).

This study aims to report the first occurrence of *P. hamrur* in the Syrian coast and a new record for the Mediterranean Sea.

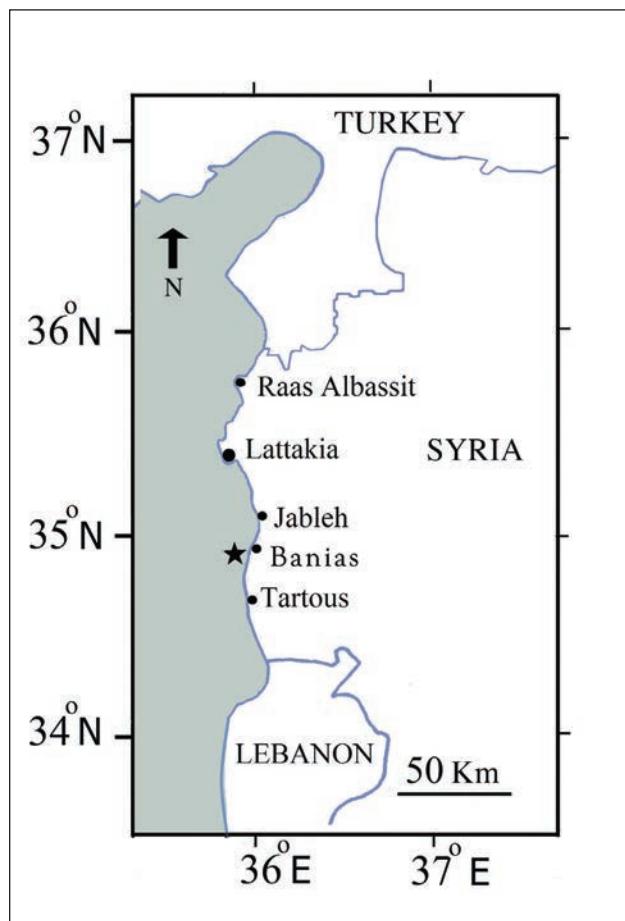


Fig. 1: Map of the Syrian coast with black star indicating the capture site of *Priacanthus hamrur*.

Sl. 1: Zemljevid sirske obale z označeno lokaliteto ulova (črna zvezdica) primerka vrste *Priacanthus hamrur*.

Tab. 1: Morphometric measurements in mm and as percentages of total length (%TL), meristic counts and weight in gram recorded in the specimen of *Priacanthus hamrur* captured off the Syrian coast.

Tab. 1: Morfometrične meritve izražene v mm in kot delež celotne dolžine (%TL), meristična štetja ter teža v gramih primerka vrste *Priacanthus hamrur*, ujetega ob sirski obali.

Reference	32-2022	
Morphometric measurements	mm	% TL
Total length	198	100.0
Standard length	164	82.8
Body depth	60	30.3
Head length	62	31.3
Eye diameter	22	11.1
Snout length	13	6.6
Upper jaw length	23	11.6
Lower jaw length	25	12.6
Dorsal fin length	92	46.5
Pectoral fin length	34	17.2
Pelvic fin length	56	28.3
Anal fin length	64	32.3
Caudal fin length	42	21.2
Pre-dorsal length	54	27.3
Pre-pectoral length	56	28.3
Pre-pelvic length	45	22.7
Pre-anal length	89	44.9
Meristic counts		
Dorsal fin	X + 14	
Pectoral fin	17	
Pelvic fin	I + 5	
Anal fin	III + 15	
Caudal fin	19	
Scales on the lateral line	80	
Vertical scale rows	48	
Gill rakers on the first gill arch	25	
Total body weight (gram)	137	



Fig. 2: *P. hamrur* captured in the Syrian coast, scale bar = 20 mm.

Sl. 2: Primerek vrste *P. hamrur*, ujet ob obali Sirije (merilo = 20 mm).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

On 18 February 2022 a specimen of moontail bullseye, *P. hamrur*, (Forsskål, 1775) was caught by a professional fisherman using a demersal gill net, at a depth of about 120 m, on muddy bottom. The capture site was located at Albassiah, south of the city of Baniyas, 2 km offshore: 35°09' N; 35°53' E (Fig. 1). Morphometric measurements were recorded to the nearest millimetre and presented as percentages of total length (% TL), and included in Table 1 together with meristic counts. The specimen was preserved in 10% buffered formalin, and deposited in the Ichthyological Collection of Environmental Research Higher Institute, Tishreen University, under catalogue number 32-2022.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The specimen of moontail bullseye, *P. hamrur*, measured 198 mm in total length (TL) and weighed 137 g (Fig. 2). It was a mature female and its stomach contained several unidentifiable remains of squid. The specimen was identified via the following features (see Ergüden et al., 2018): body ovate, its depth 2.7 times in standard length, mouth oblique with projecting lower jaw, its extremity above level of midline of body, scale rows between dorsal fin and lateral line at highest point 11, pelvic fins less than head length, soft dorsal fin moderately long,

Tab. 2: Number of gill rakers recorded in *P. hamrur* and *P. sagittarius* specimens captured in different areas, including the Syrian specimen.

Tab. 2: Število škržnih listov pri primerkih vrst *P. hamrur* in *P. sagittarius*, ujetih v različnih predelih, upoštevaje tudi sirski primerek.

Species	Number of gill rakers	Ocean of region	Authors
<i>Priacanthus hamrur</i> (?)	18	Tunisia	Abdelmoleh (1981)
<i>P. hamrur</i>	24-26	Indo-Pacific	Starnes (1988)
<i>P. hamrur</i>	24-26	Indian Ocean	Philipp (1994)
<i>P. hamrur</i>	26	Levant Basin	Ergüden et al. (2018)
<i>P. hamrur</i>	25	Levant Basin	This study
<i>P. sagittarius</i>	19-22	Indo-Pacific	Starnes (1988)
<i>P. sagittarius</i>	19-21	Indian Ocean	Ramachandran & Varghese (2009)
<i>P. sagittarius</i>	18	Levant Basin	Goren et al. (2010)
<i>P. sagittarius</i>	18	Levant Basin	Golani et al. (2011)
<i>P. sagittarius</i>	22	Egypt	Farrag et al. (2016)
<i>P. sagittarius</i>	19	Levant Basin	Gürlek et al. (2021)

pelvic fin membranes with single dark basal blotch, caudal fin margin concave or lunate, outer rays slightly longer than remainder of rays; body pink to reddish with some red bands and some small dark spots along the lateral line, fins red to light pink, pelvic fins red with a black spot at the fin base.

The morphology, morphometric measurements, meristic counts and colour are in total accordance with previous descriptions of *P. hamrur* by Starnes (1988), Ramachandran & Varghese (2009), Ergüden *et al.* (2018) and Golani *et al.* (2021). Therefore, this is the first substantiated record of *P. hamrur* from the Syrian coast, warranting the inclusion of the species in the list of local ichthyofauna. *P. hamrur* was first considered to be a casual species (Zenetas *et al.*, 2005), but its status was later amended to questionable in the central and eastern Mediterranean (Zenetas *et al.*, 2010). The change was related to a specimen originally identified as *P. hamrur* collected off Mahdia, Tunisia (Abdelmoleh, 1981). Starnes (1988) and Golani (2002) noted that the description and the photograph provided by Abdelmoleh (1981) were not sufficient to conclusively establish the identity of the specimen, which should have been confirmed through agreement with Goren *et al.* (2010).

Starnes (1988) noted that the number of gill rakers on the first gill arch plays a major role in distinguishing between the species of the genus *Priacanthus*. As evidenced by Table 2, the number of gill rakers is higher in *P. hamrur* than in *P. sagittarius*. Based on these results, Abdelmoleh's finding (1981) was not a specimen of *P. hamrur* and should be reassigned to *P. sagittarius*. It follows that the first Mediterranean record of *P. hamrur* was reported by Ergüden *et al.* (2018), and the second one in this note. Nevertheless, Abdelmoleh's finding still constitutes the first confirmed report of an alien member of the Priacanthidae from the Mediterranean Sea. Such hypothesis is further corroborated by the fact that *P. sagittarius* was described by Starnes (1988) posteriorly to Abdelmoleh's finding (1981).

All Priacanthid species inhabit similar biotopes at similar depths and do not differ much in their food and feeding habits (Starnes, 1988). Interspecific competition pressure among them cannot be totally ruled out, and it appears that nowadays *P. sagittarius* is the species most successfully established in the area of the Mediterranean. The occurrence of *P. hamrur* is based on two specimens only, and the status of the species in the Mediterranean Sea pending possible captures of other specimens incoming from the Red Sea through the Suez Canal remains obscure.

PRVI ZAPIS O POJAVLJANJU LUNASTOREPEGA VELIKOOKEGA OSTRIŽA
PRIACANTHUS HAMRUR (OSTEICHTHYES, PRIACANTHIDAE) S SIRSKE OBALE
(VZHODNO SREDOZEMSKO MORJE)

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POVZETEK

Osemnajstega februarja 2022 so v pridneno ribiško mrežo ujeli primerek lunastorepega velikookega ostriža *Priacanthus hamrur* (Forsskål, 1775) na globini okoli 120 m na muljastem dnu. Ulovili so ga blizu lokalitete Albassiah, južno od mesta Baniyas, 2 km od obale. Ta prispevek poroča o prvem zapisu za vrsto *P. hamrur* s sirske obale in verjetno o šele drugem primeru najdbe te vrste v Sredozemskem morju.

Ključne besede: *Priacanthus hamrur*, Priacanthidae, meritve, štetja, levantski bazen

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