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NEW RECORD OF THE RARE COMBTOOTH  
BLENNY *HYPLEUROCHILUS BANANENSIS* (POLL, 1959)  
(*Pisces Blenniidae*) FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

SUMMARY

In Mediterranean Sea, *Hypleurochilus bananensis* (Poll, 1959) is considered a rare species. After more than thirty years, authors rediscovered the species in Tyrrhenian Sea (Naples).

*Key words:* Tyrrhenian Sea, blenny, rare species, new record.

RIASSUNTO

*Nuova segnalazione del raro blennide Hypleurochilus bananensis (Poll, 1959) (Pisces Blenniidae) per il Mar Mediterraneo.* Nel Mar Mediterraneo, *Hypleurochilus bananensis* (Poll, 1959) è considerata una specie rara. Dopo più di trent'anni dall'ultimo rinvenimento, viene riportata la sua presenza nel Mar Tirreno (Napoli).

*Parole chiave:* Mar Tirreno, blennide, specie rara, nuova segnalazione.

INTRODUCTION

Blenniidae are one of the largest and most diversified families of fishes. The species belonging to this group are present in all warm and temperate seas of the world (with some species in fresh and brackish waters). However, most of species are chiefly tropical and subtropical and usually inhabit shallow marine waters. The genus *Hypleurochilus* includes eleven species of Atlantic origin. The most recently discovered, *Hypleurochilus brasil* Pinheiro, Gasparini et Rangel, 2013, was found in Brazil (PINHEIRO *et al.*, 2013). Only

*Hypleurochilus bananensis* (Poll, 1959) occurs in the Mediterranean Sea (and eastern Atlantic). Because its rarity, the biology of *H. bananensis* is poorly studied and little is known about its actual abundance, distribution and reproductive biology. In Italian seas, the records concern Tyrrhenian and Ionian Sea. Others records come from south-eastern of the Mediterranean Sea (BEN-TUVIA, 1971; GHARRED *et al.*, 1998). The first record of *Hypleurochilus bananensis* for the Mediterranean Sea was in the Algerian coast (BATH, 1965), only a few years after its description in the north-east coast of the Atlantic Ocean (POLL, 1959). The last record of this species in the Tyrrhenian Sea (north-western Sicily) dates back to 1977 (CATALANO, 1978).

#### METHOD

The specimen was observed during snorkelling in shallow waters within the coastal lagoon of the Lake Miseno (Tyrrhenian Sea). The pictures taken show color and morphological characteristics useful to identify the species.

#### OCCURRENCE

In October 2013, after more than thirty years, we made a new sighting of *H. bananensis* in the Tyrrhenian Sea. A specimen of this species was observed during snorkelling activity in the coastal lagoon of the Lake Miseno,



Fig. 1 — Specimen of *Hypleurochilus bananensis* recorded in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Note the wrinkled area between the eyes and the beginning of the dorsal fin.

Fig. 2 — Specimen of *Hypseurochilus bananensis* recorded in the coastal lagoon of the the Lake Miseno (Tyrrhenian Sea).

near Naples ( $40^{\circ}47'33.649''\text{N}$ ,  $14^{\circ}4'29.533''\text{E}$ ). Very recently (June 2011), *H. bananensis* was recorded along the Ionian coast, within the Mar Piccolo of Taranto (LANGENECK, 2013). It is interesting to note that both localities (Lake Miseno and Mar Piccolo of Taranto) are coastal lagoons heavily modified by human activities. The specimen, shown in Figs 1 and 2, was photographed at about 3 m depth on an artificial hard bottom covered by several encrusting and sessile organisms.



Despite some similarities with other combtooth blennies, such as *Parablennius pilicornis* (Cuvier, 1829), some morphological features make *H. bananensis* easily recognizable. In addition to the general morphology, the most important diagnostic characters are the thick superior lip, the color pattern, the marked V-like cavity between the eyes, the morphology of cirri and, above all, the wrinkled dorsal area between the head and the beginning of the dorsal fin (Fig. 1). Cirri have several ramifications, grouped in a common base. A most developed branch lies at the centre and is surrounded by several thinner and shorter branches. The body color pattern is typical. The background color is brown–yellowish with five irregular vertical dark bars extending to the lower part of the dorsal fin. The remaining part of the fins has the same color as the body. The head may have some bluish tinge. The caudal fin shows a series of alternating light and dark vertical bars (Fig. 2). In conclusion, we documented a further record of the rare blenny *Hypseurochilus bananensis* in the Mediterranean Sea providing also preliminary information about its preferred habitat. In recent years, new records of other blennies, such as *Parablennius pilicornis* (Cuvier, 1829), *Scartella cristata* (Linnaeus, 1758), *Microlipophrys dalmatinus* (Steindachner et Kolombatovic, 1883) and *Microlipophrys nigriceps* (Vinciguerra, 1883) have been reported along the Italian coast and close to them (FALZON,

2009; FALZON & FALZON, 2013; TIRALONGO, 2012a; TIRALONGO, 2012b; TIRALONGO *et al.*, 2013). However, *Hypleurochilus bananensis* is probably less rare than thought. On the other hand, the few reports and lack of information about the biology of this species are probably also due to misidentification with others blennies.

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