FIRST RECORD OF THE BLACKFISH *CENTROLOPHUS NIGER* (TELEOSTEI: CENTROLOPHIDAE) FROM THE LEBANESE WATERS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA

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ABSTRACT

Badreddine, A. & Bitar, G. (2020). First record of the blackfish *Centrolophus Niger* (Teleostei: Centrolophidae) from the Lebanese waters in the eastern Mediterranean sea. *Lebanese Science Journal,* 21(2), 262-265.

A young specimen of the blackfish, Centrolophus niger (Gmelin, 1789) was reported for the first time from the Lebanese waters. It was caught and photographed by a professional fisherman in Beirut, on 15th November 2014. The present note reports details about this first record.

Keywords: Blackfish, record, Lebanese waters, Eastern Mediterranean.

INTRODUCTION

Centrolophidae (Bonaparte, 1846) is a family of bony fish represented in the Mediterranean Sea by four species: *Centrolophus niger* (Gmelin, 1789), *Hyperoglyphe perciformis* (Mitchill, 1818), *Schedophilus medusophagus* (Coco, 1839) and *Schedophilus ovalis* (Cuvier, 1883) (Quignard & Tomasini, 2000; Ergüden et al., 2012).

The blackfish *Centrolophus niger* is an oceanic species widely distributed in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans (Iwamoto, 2015; Froese & Pauly, 2019). In the Mediterranean Sea, this species was reported from the Tyrrhenian, Adriatic, Ionian and Aegean Seas (Sartor et al., 2001; Dulcic & Lipej, 2002; D'onghia et al., 2003; Ceyhan & Akyol, 2010; Froese & Pauly, 2019). Few individuals of *Centrolophus niger* were also recorded along the Mediterranean coast of Tunisia (Ben Amor et al., 2018 and references therein) and Algeria (Dieuzeide et al., 1955). It is rarely found in the eastern basin (Golani et al., 2006). However, *C. niger* has been reported from the Hellenic Seas (Papaconstantinou, 2014), the Turkish coasts (Akyol, 2008; Ergüden et al., 2012;

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Bilecenoğlu et al., 2014; Ayas et al., 2018; Cengiz et al., 2019) and also in the Egyptian waters where only one specimen was found in 2015 between 300 and 400m depth (Farrag, 2016). Until now, this species had not been reported in the Mediterranean coast of Syria and Lebanon. This note constitutes the first record of the *C. niger* in the region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A young specimen of *C. niger* was caught by spearfishing, on 15th November 2014, at a depth of 5m in Raoucheh-Beirut (33°53'24.17"N, 35°28'14.06"E).

The caught specimen is around 334 mm in total length and 0.5 kg in total weight. It had the following diagnostic characters: dorsal fin rays IV+34, anal fin rays III+22 and pectoral fin rays 21. The specimen is also characterized by an elongated, almost tubular, dark brown/black color body. The head is small and thick with large eyes and a small mouth. The single dorsal fin is well behind the insertion point of the pectoral fins. As well as, the pectoral and pelvic fins are darker than the body color (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Centrolophus niger* caught and photographed in Beirut Lebanese waters (photo credit: Mohamad Itani).

All these morphometric and morphological characters are in agreement with the specimens reported along the Turkish (Akyol, 2008; Ergüden et al., 2012; Cengiz et al., 2019) and the Egyptian coasts (Farrag, 2016).

C. niger has a limited number of records and it is considered as a rare species (Akyol, 2008). This limited number of records can be explained first by the presence of adult individuals in deep waters (Ergüden et al., 2012) and second by its limited abundance (Ayas et al., 2018).

It is a pelagic fish, usually found on the upper continental shelf at depth of 200-700 m (Froese and Pauly, 2019). Accordingly, *C. niger* is listed as threatened species belonging to the category least concern (LC) species in the IUCN Red List (Iwamoto, 2015).

This report highlights the importance of the connection between the fisherman and scientific researcher as an effective monitoring tool (Azzuro et al., 2013; Azzuro & Bariche, 2017; Giovos et al., 2019) to detect new marine species in the Lebanese waters. In this context, it is recommended to enhance the link between Lebanese fishermen, social media and citizen science, allowing us to ensure long term protection and conservation of key marine species in the Lebanese waters and also to anticipate the effect of new species invasion. Moreover, it is also important to finalize an updated checklist of the ichthyofauna species from the Lebanese waters.

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