Lagocephalus sceleratus

(Gmelin, 1788)

Photo : Ernesto Azzurro

Relevant synonyms: None
Misidentification: None
Meristic formula: D, 11-13; A, 9-12; P, 16-18

SHORT DESCRIPTION

Body inflatable. When not inflated, body elongate with tapering caudal peduncle. Dorsal and anal fins opposite each other; both fins pointed with short base. Caudal fin emarginated. Pectoral fin wide. No pelvic fin. Head large with blunt snout. Two teeth in each jaw with median suture. Gill slit in front of pectoral fin base. Two lateral lines. Small spinules on dorsal surface, almost reaching caudal fin base, and also on the ventral surface to the anus.

color: back and upper flank silvery to grey covered with black dots. Bright silver stripe on the side; belly white.

common size: 20-60 cm (max. 85 cm).

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

- *Lagocephalus guentheri*: small spinules on the dorsal surface, not extending posteriorly beyond the pectoral fin margin.
- *Lagocephalus suezensis*: 10 dorsal rays; irregularly-shaped brown to grey dots of various sizes on its back.
- *Torquigener flavimaculosus*: round caudal fin.
- *Sphoeroides pachygaster*: smooth skin.
- *Chilomycterus spilostylus*: three rooted spines, fixed in erected position.

BIOLOGY / ECOLOGY

Capable of inflating when threatened. Feeds on benthic invertebrates. Eggs and larvae are planktonic. Highly poisonous to eat.

habitat: benthic above sandy substrate in the vicinity of the coral reef, it has been also recorded at depths of 250 m in the Red Sea.

DISTRIBUTION

Worldwide: Indo-Pacific.

Mediterranean: recorded first in Turkey (Filiz and Er 2004) then in Israel (Golani and Levy, 2005). Recently, it spread through Tunisia (Ben Souissi *et al.*, 2014) the Adriatic Sea (Šprem *et al.*, 2014), with one western most record in Ceuta, Strait of Gibraltar (Azzurro *et al.*, 2020).

*Note : the occurrence of this species in the Mediterranean was recorded previously by Mouneimne, (1977) as a misidentification of *L. suezensis*.

MODE OF INTRODUCTION

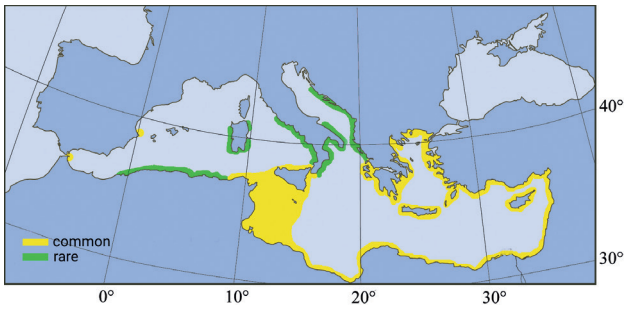
Via the Suez Canal.

ESTABLISHMENT SUCCESS

Very common.

IMPORTANCE TO HUMANS

Negative impacts on fishery activities as it is very dangerous to eat, due to its highly toxic nature. Several cases of fatal poisoning have been reported from Turkey, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt. Due to its toxicity, many Mediterranean countries have promptly responded by informing the general public about the risks associated to the consumption of this species.



1st Med. record
Gökova Bay,
Turkey, 2003*

KEY REFERENCES

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