

**OPHICHTHIDAE**

snake eels

**Pisodonophis semicinctus**

(Richardson, 1848)



Relevant synonyms: None  
Misidentification: None

Drawing : Tuvia Kurz

**SHORT DESCRIPTION**

Body elongated, eel-like, almost cylindrical. Head conical with a slightly prominent snout. Anterior nostril in form of a tube directed downward; posterior nostril opening under the eye, covered by a flap. Teeth molariform multiseriate on jaws and vomer. Dorsal and anal fins well developed, ending before a short caudal segment of the body which is naked and hardened. Short pectoral fin with 10-11 rays, immediately behind a small lunate gill opening. Ten to twelve prepectoral pores and 53-59 preanal pores. Caudal fin absent. 155-162 vertebrae.

**color:** yellowish with 15-18 saddle-like dark patches which cover about 3/4 of the sides, the first on head and the second over the pectoral fin; other small black patches on the head.

**common size:** to 95 cm.

**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS**

**Muraenidae, Heterenchelyidae, Xenocongridae, Nettastomatidae:** no pectoral fin.

**Congridae** and **Muraenesocidae:** body colour uniform.

- *Apterichthys* spp., *Dalophis imberbis*: no pectoral fin.
- *Echelus myrus*, *Ophichthus rufus*, *Ophisurus serpens*: body colour uniform.
- *Ophichthus ophis*: sharp pointed teeth.

## BIOLOGY / ECOLOGY

Feeds on molluscs, crustaceans and other benthic invertebrates.

**habitat:** shallow waters (10-30 m depth), burrowing in sandy or muddy bottoms, and also in seagrass beds and rocky bottoms.

## DISTRIBUTION

**Worldwide:** eastern Atlantic, common from Gibraltar to Angola and rare outside the inter-tropical zone.

**Mediterranean:** recorded first on Algerian coast (Dieuzeide and Roland, 1958). Successive records in the Gulf of Lions, France (Escoubet *et al.*, 1981), southern Sicily, Italy (Insacco and Zava, 1999), Strait of Sicily (Ragonese and Giusto, 2000), northern Tyrrhenian Sea (Serena, 2001), eastern Sicily (Cantone *et al.*, 2003), Tunisian coast (Bradai, 2004), southern Turkey (Bilecenoglu *et al.*, 2009) and northern Corsica, France (Bodilis *et al.*, 2012).

## MODE OF INTRODUCTION

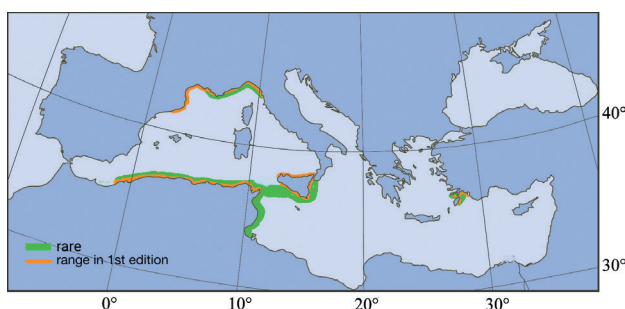
Via Gibraltar.

## ESTABLISHMENT SUCCESS

Rare.

## IMPORTANCE TO HUMANS

None.



1<sup>st</sup> Med. record  
Algerian coast, 1958

## KEY REFERENCES

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- Dieuzeide R. and Roland J. 1958. Deuxième complément au catalogue des poissons des côtes algériennes. *Bulletin des travaux publiés par la station d'aquaculture et de pêche de Castiglione*, 9: 103-132.
- Escoubet P., Muriga P. and Pras A. 1981. Note sur la présence de *Pisodonophis semicinctus* (Richardson, 1848) sur les côtes françaises (Anguilliformes, Ophichthidae). *Cybium*, 5: 101-102.
- Insacco G. and Zava B. 1999. First record of the Saddled snake eel *Pisodonophis semicinctus* (Richardson, 1848) in Italian waters (Osteichthyes, Ophichthidae). *Atti della Società Italiana di Scienze naturali e del Museo Civico di Storia Naturale in Milano*, 140: 283-286.