

— SHORT COMMUNICATION —

## Occurrence of oilfish *Ruvettus pretiosus* Cocco, 1829 (Perciformes: Gempylidae) in Chalkidiki peninsula, North Aegean Sea, Greece

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The occurrence of the species *Ruvettus pretiosus* in Greek waters was known for the Ionian Sea and the Aegean Sea, mainly at South. The recent capture of a specimen in Gerakini bay, Chalkidiki (N Greece), documents for the first time the presence of the species in the area and for the second time in the North Aegean Sea.

**Key words:** *Ruvettus pretiosus*, oilfish, wax esters, Mediterranean, North Aegean Sea, ichthyofauna.

### INTRODUCTION

The Aegean Sea is typically temperate and, concerning the distribution of its fish fauna, it can be separated into two regions: the North Aegean Sea, above the line connecting the southernmost point of Euboea to Chios Island, characterized by cold-water fauna, and the South Aegean Sea, below this line, characterized by a more thermophilic species composition, including the Lessepsian immigrants (Papakonstantinou, 1988; Labropoulou, 2007). The North Aegean Sea waters are economically very important for Greece, because the region supports the main commercial fishing industry at national level (Sylaios *et al.*, 2006).

*Ruvettus pretiosus* Cocco, 1829 is a thermophilic species, member of the Gempylidae family (oilfishes, snake mackerels and escolars) and the only species in the genus *Ruvettus*. It is a cosmopolitan oceanic benthopelagic species, widely distributed in all tropical and subtropical seas, usually solitary or in pairs (Froese & Pauly, 2011). *Ruvettus pretiosus* is the only species of the family Gempylidae that dwells in the Me-

diterranean Sea (Quignard & Tomasini, 2000), mainly at depths from 100 m to 700 m, but also at surface (Megalofonou *et al.*, 1993; Bettoso & Dulčić, 1999). It feeds on fishes, squids and crustaceans and can reach 3 m in total length and over 60 kg in weight (Nakamura & Parin, 1993; Vasilakopoulos *et al.*, 2009; Froese & Pauly, 2011).

The present study documents the first finding of *R. pretiosus* in the North Aegean waters of Chalkidiki.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

One specimen of *R. pretiosus* (160 cm in total length, 16 kg in weight) was caught with longline by two amateur fishermen in Gerakini Bay, Chalkidiki (Fig. 1), on 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, in the sea area between Kalives village and Skala Gerakinis at 2 m of depth.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Unfortunately, the specimen was already sliced, skinless and chopped when the authors arrived at the above location, therefore morphometric and meristic data were not obtained. The specimen was identified according to Golani *et al.* (2006), with the help of

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FIG. 1. North Aegean Sea. The black dot indicates the location where the specimen was caught.

photos of the sample taken by the two fishermen before the slicing (Fig. 2). Although the lack of morphometric measurements and meristics, the species has unique characteristics that distinguish it from the other species that belong to the Gempylidae family. The skin was very rough and its scales were interspersed with spinous bony tubercles. The body was uniformly brown to dark brown, while the tips of the pectoral and pelvic fins were black. Total length and weight of the specimen from Gerakini agree with Bettoso & Dulčić (1999) and Vasilakopoulos *et al.* (2011).

In the Mediterranean Sea, *Ruvettus pretiosus* occurs mainly at the south regions, i.e. South Adriatic, Ionian and South Aegean Seas (Fischer *et al.*, 1987; Papakonstantinou, 1988, 1990; Bettoso & Dulčić,



FIG. 2. The individual of *Ruvettus pretiosus* captured in the North Aegean Sea.

1999) and Levantine basin as well (Kaya & Bilecenoglu, 1999; Vasilakopoulos *et al.*, 2009; Dalamas & Megalofonou, 2010). It has been also signaled from the North Adriatic Sea (Bettoso & Dulčić, 1999). In the North Aegean Sea, the species was firstly reported from samplings performed in the period 1990-1993 (Labropoulou & Papakonstantinou, 2000), without details regarding the number of individuals and the location of capture. The finding described in this study represents the first documented record of *R. pretiosus* in the waters of Chalkidiki peninsula and the second one for the North Aegean after two decades. According to Azzurro (2008), in the last decades, many native fish species with tropical or subtropical affinity and origin, have been signaled northern than their known typical range in the southern Mediterranean, contributing to the so-called “meridionalization” process of this basin. Being *R. pretiosus* a native thermophilic species, the status of its population in the coldest part of the Aegean Sea “needs to be evaluated on a continuous basis”, as asserted by Bettoso & Dulčić (1999) for the North Adriatic Sea.

The species has limited interest in fisheries, being caught usually at depths from 200 m to 400 m as an incidental by-catch in the drifting surface longlines

targeting tuna and swordfish (Vasilakopoulos et al., 2011). Recent studies gave new data regarding the biology, bathymetric distribution and abundance of the species in Southeastern Mediterranean (Vasilakopoulos et al., 2009; Damalas & Megalofonou, 2010; Vasilakopoulos et al., 2011).

The flesh of the species is oily and it can be poisonous to eat, because of the wax esters that it contains (Damalas & Megalofonou, 2010). The main symptoms of poisoning after ingestion are heavily vomiting, nausea and orange diarrhea that is called keriorrhea (flow of wax) (Ling et al., 2009).

Despite the above, Damalas & Megalofonou (2010) report that in Greece the flesh of oilfish “is sold in retail markets erroneously as processed shark fillets under the name of *galeos*”. It is worth to underline that none of the people who have consumed the flesh of our specimen presented any health problems (vomiting, nausea, etc.).

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