

First record of dwarf flathead *Elates ransonnetii* (Platycephalidae) in the Mediterranean Sea (North-Western Ionian Sea)

by

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RÉSUMÉ. - Premier signalement du platycéphale *Elates ransonnetii* en mer Méditerranée (mer Ionienne nord-occidentale).

Un *Elates ransonnetii* (Steindachner, 1876) a été capturé, en octobre 2005, en mer Méditerranée le long de la côte italienne (mer Ionienne), dans le golfe de Tarente. L'individu a été capturé par 20 m de profondeur sur un fond sableux. Il s'agit d'un mâle de 147 mm de longueur totale, sexuellement mature.

Key words. - Platycephalidae - *Elates ransonnetii* - MED - Ionian Sea - First record.

The platycephalids (from Greek *platys* = flat and *kephale* = head), commonly known as flathead fish, belong to a family of tropical and temperate marine fish. They are characterized by an elongated body, depressed head and large mouth with the lower jaw longer than the upper one. These benthic fishes are frequently found on muddy or sandy bottoms of the continental shelf at depths down to 300 m, frequently shallower than 100 m (Knapp, 1999;

Table I - Morphometric measurements of *Elates ransonnetii* caught in the North-Western Ionian Sea (October 2005). [Données morphométriques du spécimen d'*Elates ransonnetii* capturé en mer Ionienne nord-occidentale en octobre 2005.]

Measurements	(mm)	%
Total length included caudal filament (TL)	147.0	-
Fork length	134.0	91.2 TL
Standard length	125.0	85.0 TL
Caudal filament length	5.7	3.9 TL
Pre-anal length	61.0	41.5 TL
Pre-dorsal length	40.2	27.3 TL
Pre-pelvic length	38.3	26.1 TL
Pre-pectoral length	35.3	24.0 TL
Pre-orbital length	16.2	11.0 TL
Body width	8.4	5.7 TL
Body depth	15.2	10.3 TL
Head length until to operculum (HL)	39.6	26.9 TL
Pre-opercular spine	9.4	23.6 HL
Max. eye diameter	7.0	17.7 HL
Upper jaw length	11.0	27.8 HL
Lower jaw length	12.6	31.9 HL

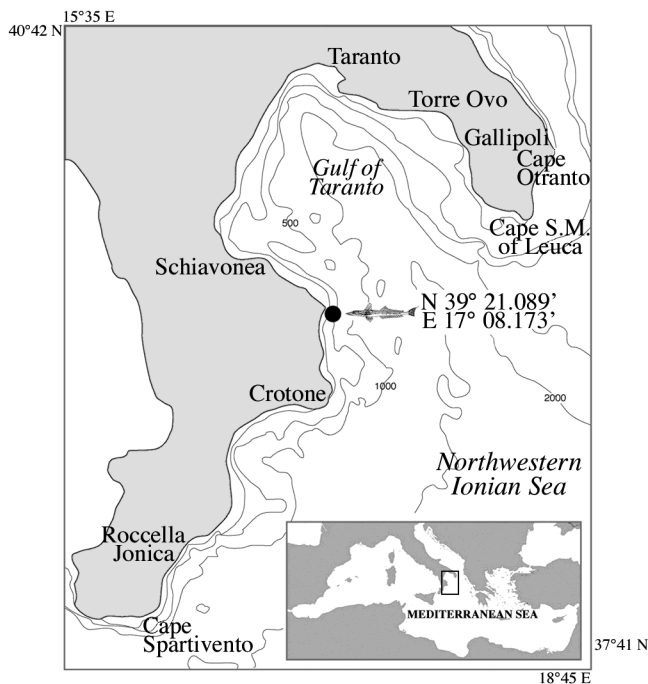


Figure 1. - Map of the North-Western Ionian Sea showing the capture site of *Elates ransonnetii* (October 2005). [Localisation du lieu de capture d'*Elates ransonnetii* en mer Ionienne nord-occidentale en octobre 2005.]

Froese and Pauly, 2005).

Platycephalidae include about 17 genera (Imamura, 1996). In particular, the genus *Elates*, with one species, *E. ransonnetii* (Steindachner, 1876), is characterized by a single long pre-opercular spine, a caudal fin with a single upper caudal-fin ray ending in an elongated filament and a dorsal fin with 6 spines (Knapp, 1999). The upper eye lacks dermal papillae.

E. ransonnetii is a small littoral fish dwelling in shallow waters down to 50 m in depth on sandy or muddy bottoms. Its maximum total length is about 190 mm (Knapp, 1999; Froese and Pauly, 2005). This species is commonly recorded from the Timor Sea off Australia to Papua New Guinea, and along the coast of Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, South China and the Philippines (Knapp, 1999).

A specimen of *E. ransonnetii* was collected, on 24 October 2005, along the southern coast of the Gulf of Taranto (North-Western Ionian Sea) near the delta of the stream Lipuda (Fig. 1). It was accidentally caught in a professional gill net (about 350 m long; 1.2 m high, and with stretched mesh size of 20 mm) at about 20 m depth on a sandy bottom. It was identified using the taxonomic key of the Platycephalidae by Knapp (1999). Morphometric measurements and the meristic formula were recorded in order to identify the species.

This specimen is preserved in the collection of Zoological Museum of the University of Bari (Code: MUZAC-1190).

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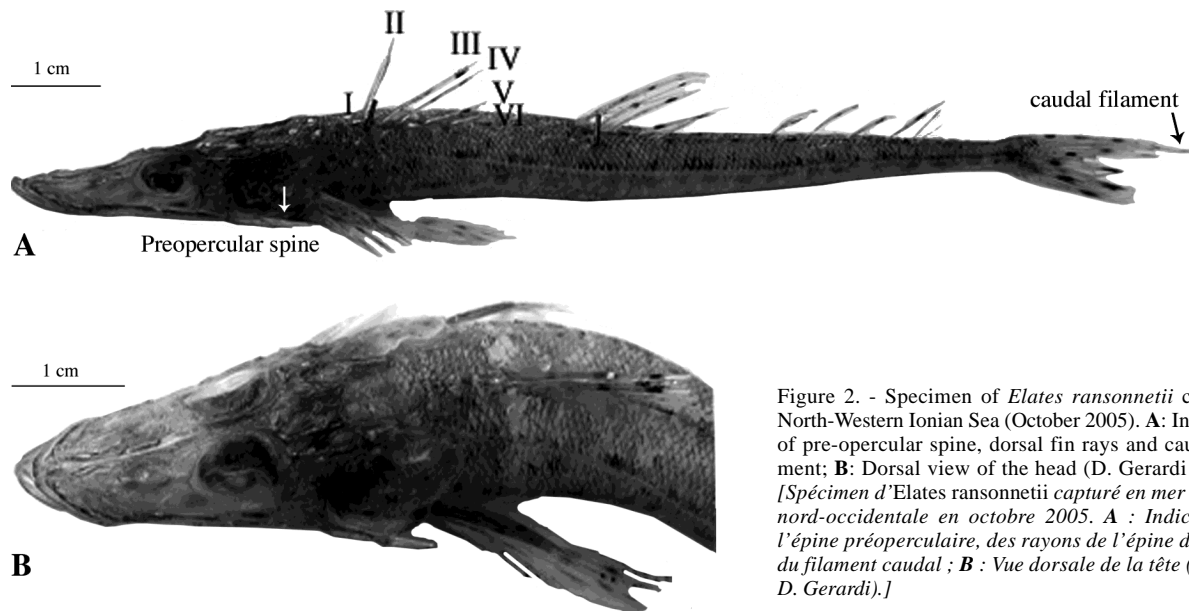


Figure 2. - Specimen of *Elates ransonnetii* caught in North-Western Ionian Sea (October 2005). **A**: Indications of pre-opercular spine, dorsal fin rays and caudal filament; **B**: Dorsal view of the head (D. Gerardi Photos). [Spécimen d'*Elates ransonnetii* capturé en mer Ionienne nord-occidentale en octobre 2005. **A** : Indication de l'épine préoperculaire, des rayons de l'épine dorsale et du filament caudal ; **B** : Vue dorsale de la tête (Photos : D. Gerardi).]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The specimen is a ripe male of 147 mm in total length (including the filament of the caudal fin) and 7.5 g in weight (Fig. 2). The main morphometric measurements and the percentages of the total length (TL) or head length (HL) are reported in table I.

The meristic formula is: D VI-13; A 12; P 20; V 7; LL 102; GR 20 (first gill arch). The head and the body colour varies from light tan to cream with orange and brown spots while dorsal and caudal fins show scattered black spots.

This species is commonly found in the Western Central Pacific (Froese and Pauly, 2005). One specimen has been taken off the coast of Burma but there are no records from the Western Indian Ocean and the Red Sea (Knapp, pers. com.). With its unexpected appearance in the Ionian Sea, one might speculate that young stages of *E. ransonnetii* were transferred from ballast water of a ship.

The first record of a Platycephalidae in the Mediterranean Sea was *Platycephalus indicus*, collected in 1953 along the coast of Israel (Ben-Tuvia, 1953). It apparently successively spread along the coasts of Egypt and Lebanon (Krefft, 1963; Mouneimne, 1977). Moreover, individuals of *Sorsogona prionata* (as *Platycephalus* sp.: Haas and Steinitz, 1947; Golani and Ben-Tuvia, 1990) and *Papilloculiceps longiceps* (Golani and Ben-Tuvia, 1990) were found in 1947 and in 1990, respectively, along the Israeli coast (Golani *et al.*, 2002). No Platycephalidae fish were recorded in the Mediterranean Sea before the opening of the Suez Canal (Golani and Ben-Tuvia, 1990; Amori *et al.*, 1993; Golani *et al.*, 2002).

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