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FISTULARIDAE) AND PAREXOCOETUS MENTO
(OSTEICHTHYES, EXOCOETIDAE)**

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Short Note

LESSEPSIAN MIGRANT FISHES OFF THE COAST OF TUNISIA. FIRST RECORD OF *FISTULARIA COMMERSIONII* (OSTEICHTHYES, FISTULARIDAE) AND *PAREXOCOETUS MENTO* (OSTEICHTHYES, EXOCOETIDAE)

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LESSEPSIAN FISHES
NEW RECORDS
TUNISIA

ABSTRACT. – The Lessepsian migrant fishes along the Tunisian coast are represented by eight species, two of which *Fistularia commersonii* Rüppell, 1835 and *Parexocoetus mento* (Valenciennes, 1846) being reported for the first time.

POISSONS LESSEPSIENS
PREMIÈRES CAPTURES
TUNISIE

RÉSUMÉ. – Sur les côtes tunisiennes les Poissons lessepsiens sont représentés par 8 espèces dont 2 sont signalées pour la première fois : *Fistularia commersonii* Rüppell, 1835 et *Parexocoetus mento* (Valenciennes, 1846).

Since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, 62 species of Red Sea Fishes have entered the Mediterranean (Golani *et al.* 2002, Golani *et al.* 2004). The invasion rate has accelerated in recent years (Quignard & Tomasini 2000, Golani *et al.* 2002). A lot of these immigrants, such as *Sargocentron rubrum*, *Saurida undosquamis*, *Siganus luridus*, *S. rivulatus*, *Upeneus moluccensis*, have established large population in the eastern Mediterranean. About 40 species are considered as well established and more than 30 species are abundant (Golani *et al.* 2002).

In the last two decades some of these Erythrean fishes have dispersed westward along the northern and southern coast of the eastern Mediterranean and one of them, *Stephanolepis diaspros*, has reached the northern coast of Sicily (Catalano & Zava 1993). Off the south-western coast from the Nile river to Tunisia, 22 Lessepsian fishes were recorded in Egypt (Golani *et al.* 2002), nine in Libya (Al-Hassan & Silini 1999, Golani *et al.* 2002) and six off the eastern coast of Tunisia. In the gulf of Gabes four were recorded: *Stephanolepis diaspros* by Chakroun (1966), *Siganus luridus*, *S. rivulatus* by Ktari & Ktari (1974), and *Pempheris vanicolensis* by Bradai & Bouain (2001). Off Madhia and Lampedusa two species were found: *Leiognathus klunzingeri* by Ben Tuvia (1966) and *Priacanthus hamrur* by Abdelmoulah (1991). In the Gulf of Tunis, *Siganus luridus* was reported by Ktari-Chakroun & Bouhhal (1971). Among these colonizers

only *Stephanolepis diaspros* is abundant and belongs to the common fishes of the gulf of Gabes (Ben Othman 1971, Bradai 2000).

It appears that the invasion of the Tunisian coast by new Red Sea fishes is a continuing process. In February 1999 a flying fish, *Parexocoetus mento* of 90 mm Standard Length (SL) was collected off Kerkennah Islands with other pelagic fishes (Clupeidae) and in November 2002 a Blue spotted Cornetfish, *Fistularia commersonii*, was caught by gillnet at a depth of 21 m off Zarzis (south Gulf of Gabes); this specimen is 987 mm in Standard Length (SL). The area taken up by *F. commersonii* has rapidly extended as soon as October 2003 when three new specimens were caught near Sfax (central part of the Gulf of Gabes) and five off Kelibia (northern coast of Tunisia).

Parexocoetus mento was caught for the first time in the Mediterranean (Palestine) in 1935 (Bruun 1935), off the Libyan coasts in 1966 (Ben Tuvia 1966) and Albania in 1986 (Parin 1986). *Fistularia commersonii* has been recorded on the 10th of January 2000 off the coast of Israel (Golani 2000). Then, it was located off Turkey (Bilecenoglu *et al.* 2002) and Rhodes (Corsini *et al.* 2002). This immigrant is of particular scientific interest since it appeared along the coast of Levant, almost immediately, in large numbers.

Fistularia commersonii is known to be a piscivorous fish (Khalaf & Disi 1997) living soli-

tary or in large schools in the vicinity of coral reefs (Fritzsche 1976). But Golani (2000) wrote that *F. commersonii* "may also inhabit the shallow sandy shore". The present distribution of *F. commersonii* on the Eastern coast of Tunisia points out that even if there are no coral reefs, the biotic and abiotic conditions are propitious to its establishment in this area where the substratum is rocky or sandy with large area of *Caulerpa prolifera* and *Posidonia oceanica*.

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