

FIRST RECORDS OF THE LITTLE SLEEPER SHARK, *SOMNIOSUS ROSTRATUS*, IN MALTESE FISHERIES' LANDINGS

Adriana Vella ^{1*}, Noel Vella ¹ and Elizabeth Dent ²

¹ University of Malta - adriana.vella@um.edu.mt

² University of Bath

Abstract

In 2011, two little sleeper sharks, *Somniosus rostratus*, were captured from the Central Mediterranean, making them the first two records of this shark species landed in the Maltese Islands. These records fall within the outer most eastern distribution range of the species

Keywords: *Elasmobranchii, Fisheries, South-Central Mediterranean*

Introduction

The little sleeper shark, *Somniosus rostratus* (Risso, 1826), is a deep-sea shark living in a depth range of 180m to 2220m, with a geographic distribution is limited to the Northeast Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea [1,2,3], with absent to very rare occurrence in the Eastern Mediterranean basin [4, 5]. In 2009, it has been evaluated as Data Deficient by IUCN, due to its rarity possibly related to a natural low population density and lack of records within scientific surveys [6, 7]. In the Mediterranean Sea, *Somniosus rostratus*, as being evaluated as Least Concern [8], as it occurs below the depth of many demersal fisheries, while the restricted fishing activities below 1000m in the Mediterranean offering protection to this deep-sea species. Nonetheless, this species is still vulnerable at shallower parts of its depth range, whereas the lack of scientific knowledge on the species and its small geographical distribution range make any data available on this species valuable.

Methods

As part of ongoing fisheries and conservation research on elasmobranchs ongoing since 2002, the conservation biology research group conducts regular fishmarket surveys to keep detailed records of elasmobranch species landed in the Maltese Islands. Any first time landed species is collected for further studies. This paper presents one such record.

Results and Discussion

In June, 2011, two specimens of *Somniosus rostratus*, were landed at the Maltese fisheries. These two specimens represent the first two landing records of this species amongst the fisheries species landed in the Maltese Islands. They were caught together as by-catch on long-lines off the Northeast of Malta. They were identified on the basis of their morphological characters [2,9]. These two specimens were both females having a total length of 935mm and 1036mm (Figure 1) respectively. The smaller specimen was an immature female with a gonosomatic index [(GW/TW)*100] of 0.5, while a gonosomatic index of 19.2 was noted for the second specimen. Additionally the second specimen had expanded and round uteri full of yolk. The hepatosomatic index [(LW/TW)*100] was 12.4 and 9.7 respectively, indicating a large liver in both specimens, as expected in sub-adult and adult shark specimens [10].



Fig. 1. Specimen of *Somniosus rostratus* landed at the Fish market of the Maltese Islands in 2011.

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