

Status of the genus *Macroramphosus* (Syngnathiformes: Centriscidae) in the eastern Mediterranean Sea

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Abstract

Two sympatric species, *M. scolopax* (Linnaeus) and *M. gracilis* (Lowe), were examined based on samplings carried out at the eastern Mediterranean Sea (Turkey). The latter species has frequently been considered a synonym of *M. scolopax*; however, it is distinct by the following combination of characters: first dorsal fin originating before anus, second spine of first dorsal not extending beyond second dorsal fin base, length between two dorsal fins greater than the eye diameter, ventral scutes not protruding, and projecting scute between pelvic and anal fins less developed.

Key words: Centriscidae, *Macroramphosus scolopax*, *Macroramphosus gracilis*, Mediterranean Sea

Introduction

The family Centriscidae includes small-sized gregarious fishes that are characterized by a laterally compressed body, head with a long tubular snout and a small terminal mouth (Ehrich, 1986). In the Mediterranean Sea, this family is represented by a single genus, *Macroramphosus*. Several authors claim that the genus is monotypic, represented only by *M. scolopax*, and have defended the synonymization of the two species (D'Ancona, 1933; Ehrich, 1975, 1976, 1986; Fischer et al., 1987). The existence of phenotypically intermediate individuals, and the difficulty in collecting small sized *M. scolopax* (Linnaeus) specimens has led some authors to consider *M. gracilis* as a juvenile form of *M. scolopax* (Assis, 1992). However, the deep-bodied *M. scolopax* and the slender-bodied *M. gracilis* have been recognized as two valid species in studies carried out at the Atlantic Ocean; this viewpoint is based on observations of distinct differences in age and growth (Brethes, 1979; Borges, 2000), reproductive biology (Arruda, 1988), morphology (Assis, 1992, 1993) and feeding habits (Matthiessen et al., 2003). Recent investigations on the