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### First record of the moray eel *Gymnothorax reticularis*, Bloch, 1795 in the Mediterranean Sea, with a note on its taxonomy and distribution

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#### Abstract

The first Red-Sea Indo-Pacific alien moray eel in the Eastern Mediterranean is reported here. A single specimen of *Gymnothorax reticularis* was captured by a commercial bottom-trawl vessel off the northern coast of Israel. Morphological and anatomical similarities with the single known Red-Sea specimen raise an old taxonomic dilemma.

**Key words:** Mediterranean Sea, alien species, *Gymnothorax reticularis*

#### Introduction

The Levant Basin is regarded today as the world's most invaded marine ecosystem, being highly subjected to Indo-Pacific faunal invasion (Edelist *et al.* 2012). The number of reported alien Indo-Pacific species of fish is currently above 90 and rapidly approaching its hundredth record (Galil and Goren, in press).

The moray eels (family Muraenidae) are the second most diverse family in the order of true eels, Anguilliformes (Smith 2012). At present there are about 200 valid species belonging to 15 genera (Smith 2012; Froese & Pauly 2013). The genus *Gymnothorax*, Bloch 1795 represents more than half of the world's muraenids (124 species) and is regarded as a polyphyletic assemblage of ungrouped moray eels (Smith 2012). *Gymnothorax reticularis* is the type species for this genus.

Three muraenid species with an east-Atlantic origin inhabit the east Mediterranean: *Muranea helena*, L, *Gymnothorax unicolor*, (Delaroché, 1809) and *Enchelycore anatina*, (Lowe, 1838) (Froese & Pauly 2013). This is the first record of *Gymnothorax reticularis* Bloch, 1795 in the Mediterranean and the first report of an alien Pacific muraenid in the Mediterranean.

#### Material and methods

Abbreviations: TAU—Fish collection of the Zoological Museum at Tel Aviv University; HL—Head length; ED—Eye diameter; TL—Total length.

#### *Gymnothorax reticularis* Bloch, 1795

(Figure 1)

*Gymnothorax reticularis* Bloch 1795: 85, pl. 416. Type locality: Coromandel Coast, India.

**Material examined.** TAU – P.14971, one specimen, off Rosh Hanikra, Israel (33°02' N, 35°04' E), depth: 60 m, coll. Z. Haibatov (captain of the commercial bottom trawler "Or David"), 2 January 2013. TL 460 mm, Weight 113 g,

**General description.** The current *Gymnothorax* species belongs to a group of Indo-Pacific banded morays that are characterized by a color pattern of dark bars on a pale cream-colored background. In this presented *G. reticularis*, the