

***Tripterygion delaisi* (Pisces, Perciformes, Tripterygiidae), a new species for the Maltese Islands (Central Mediterranean)**

Mark-Anthony Falzon⁴

The family Tripterygiidae (Eng. Threefin blennies) is represented by three species in the Mediterranean. Two of these have been recorded for the Maltese Islands. *Tripterygion tripteronotus* Risso 1810 (Malt: Budakkra rasha sewda) is common and widespread and was recorded by Gulia (1861), Despott (1919), Lanfranco (1993), and Falzon (1999). *Tripterygion melanurus melanurus* Guichenot 1845 (Malt: Bżaru sekond) was recorded for the first time by Falzon (*op. cit.*) and has since been found to be common and fairly widespread. This brief paper reports on a third species that has been found.

Tripterygion delaisi Cadenat and Blache 1971 (= *T. xanthosoma* Zander and Heymer 1971) is distributed in the Mediterranean and along the Atlantic coast from southern England to Senegal, Madeira, and the Canaries (Whitehead *et al.* 1986). The reproductive period lasts from May to July in the northern Mediterranean (*ibid.*) and April to July in the Mediterranean in general (Riedl 1991, Miller & Loates 1997). The following is the first record for the Maltese Islands.

One individual fish was observed by the author at a depth of ca. 2m at Mgarr ix-Xini, Gozo, on 3 May 2003 (p.m.). The habitat is a shady steep rock face characterised by algal growths and frequent crevices. The fish was noted to be very approachable and was observed closely over a span of about 5 minutes, in excellent light. Notes were taken on the spot.

Characteristics: Typical Tripterygiidae 'Gurnard-like' shape and dorsal fin in three sections, the first two with spiny and the last with soft rays. In this case the first rays of the second dorsal were greatly prolonged – a characteristic of territorial males (Whitehead *et al.* 1986). The coloration was also typical of territoriality. The body was of an intense lemon-yellow colour, contrasting greatly and very conspicuously with the black head and pelvic fins. Five very faint broad vertical bars could be made out. The edges to the dorsal fins (particularly the prolonged second) were blue. The dark spot on the caudal peduncle with an extension onto the base of the caudal finrays, which is typical of the species, was not clearly discernible; the absence of this character is a feature of territorial males (Riedl *op. cit.*). Size was about 70 mm.

The only species with which *T. delaisi* could be confused is *T. tripteronotus*. However, males are quite unmistakable during the reproductive season, since the colour of *T. tripteronotus* is a conspicuous red with a black head, while that of *T. delaisi* is yellow with a black head. The species is not known to have any colour variants (although *T. delaisi* was previously thought to be a yellow variant of *T. tripteronotus*).

Two subspecies are recognised. The nominate is found in the Atlantic while *T. delaisi xanthosoma* is distributed in the Mediterranean. Although the behavioural and ecological data required definitively to tell these subspecies apart are not available at this stage, it is presumed that the individual observed belonged to *T. delaisi xanthosoma*.

I have since been informed that two other individuals were observed by divers on 27 April 2003 (a.m.) at Dahlet ix-Xilep, at a depth of 8 – 18m. Both displayed the coloration of territorial males (O. Cardona, pers. comm.).

It is proposed that the species be given the Maltese name 'Bżaru isfar'.

(Accepted: 9th September 2003)

REFERENCES

- Despott, G.** 1919. *The Ichthyology of Malta*. Malta: Critien's Press.
- Falzon, Mark-Anthony** 1999. A Survey of Blenniidae, Clinidae, and Tripterygiidae (Pisces) in Maltese waters (Central Mediterranean), including four previously unrecorded species. *The Central Mediterranean Naturalist* 3 (1): 17 – 22.
- Gulia, Gavino** 1861. *Tentamen Ichthyologiae melitensis sistens methodo naturali stripum objectis nonnullis observationibus genera ac species, a recentioribus de re zoologica scriptoribus admissas piscium insularis Melitae*. Malta: Tipographia Anglica.
- Lanfranco, Guido** 1993. *The Fish around Malta (Central Mediterranean)*. (first published in 1958 as *A Complete Guide to the Fishes of Malta*.) Malta: Progress Press.
- Miller, P.J. & M.J. Loates** 1997. *Fish of Britain and Europe*. London: Harper Collins.
- Riedl, Rupert** 1991. *Fauna e Flora del Mediterraneo*. Padova: Franco Muzzio editore.
- Whitehead, P.J.P., M.L. Bauchot, J.C. Hureau, J. Nielsen & E. Tortonese** (eds.) 1986. *Fishes of the North Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean*. 3 vols. UNESCO: London.
-

⁴ "Posidonia", America Str., Naxxar Nxr 05, Malta.