

On the occurrence of *Schedophilus ovalis* (Cuvier, 1833) and *S. medusophagus* Cocco, 1839 (Perciformes, Centrolophidae) in Maltese waters.

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The family Centrolophidae includes Atlantic and Mediterranean pelagic fish which seek shelter under floating debris and which do not reside for very long periods under moored floats such as those used by in Malta for catching dolphin fish (*Coryphaena hippurus* Linn.) There are three species from this family which are found occasionally in Maltese waters, two in the genus *Schedophilus*, *S. ovalis* (Cuvier, 1833) and *S. medusophagus* Cocco, 1839 and one in the genus *Centrolophus*, *C. niger* (Gmelin, 1789). *S. ovalis* (Cuvier, 1833) (fig.1) can reach a length of one metre while *S. medusophagus* is much smaller, not exceeding 30 cm in length. These species of fish are known to feed on jellyfish, but they also feed on other marine animals present in the plankton and scavenge dead fish (Debelius 1997).

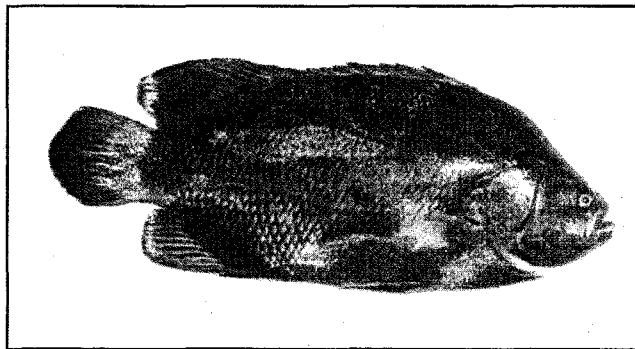


Fig. 1 *Schedophilus ovalis*

Lanfranco (1965) records *S. medusophagus* Cocco, while the same author later records *S. ovalis* (Val.) indicating that *S. medusophagus* should be referred to as *S. ovalis*, but giving no further explanation (Lanfranco, 1993). Farrugia Randon & Sammut (1999), probably following Lanfranco (1993), cite only *S. ovalis*, repeated by Farrugia Randon (2001) and Farrugia Randon & Micallef (2004) in their checklists.

When alive, *S. ovalis* shows some similarities to juveniles of *Polyprion americanus* (Bloch & Schneider, 1801) also known as wreckfish (Malt. *hanzir*); these are caught at the same time of the year (during the dolphin fish season). However, *S. ovalis* is much flatter, the mouth is smaller and the front of the head is much blunter. *S. ovalis* has always been known in the Maltese fishing community by the vernacular name of "fallakka".

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