

A massive record of the rare ‘mole crab’ *Albunea carabus* (Decapoda: Anomura: Hippoidea) along the sandy coasts of Catania

Danilo SCUDERI^{1*}, Alberto VILLARI² & Massimiliano ANGELICO²

Amongst the Crustacea, the Decapoda (which include crayfish, crabs, lobsters, prawns, and shrimp) represent a highly diverse group adapted to many different marine and freshwater environments. Members of the Superfamily Hippoidea are commonly referred to as mole crabs. This group includes three families of which one, Albuneidae, is represented in the Mediterranean basin by only one species, the mole crab, *Albunea carabus* (Linnaeus, 1758). This species prefers sandy bottoms, where it borrows in littoral sites exposed to high hydrodynamic processes. Along the Mediterranean coasts and Atlantic Ocean, it appears to be a well-established and distributed species, even if its findings have always been based on very few specimens from single localities. The only exception was a rare case in the Atlantic, where a number of massive findings were reported.

During the Winter of 2017, thousands of specimens of this ‘mole crab’ were found beached, mostly still alive, along the sandy coasts of Catania (eastern Sicily). Marine birds, and stray dogs preyed on them. This environment is characterised by a homogeneous bottom of fine sand, and freshwater affluxes come from numerous rivers and torrents with strong water currents in certain places. Based on this beaching of *Albunea carabus*, this communication reports the first massive record of this species in the Mediterranean.

¹ IISS “E. Majorana”, via L. Capuana, 36 - 95048 Scordia, Sicily, Italy

² Via Villa Contino 30, 98124 Messina, Sicily, Italy

* Corresponding author. E-mail: danscu@tin.it