

Depth records of *Ophidion barbatum* (Ophidiiformes, Ophidiidae) in western Mediterranean

by

M.R. HERNÁNDEZ (1), D. RIBAS (1), M. MUÑOZ (1),
M. CASADEVALL (1) & L. Gil DE SOLA (2)

RÉSUMÉ. - Record de profondeur de *Ophidion barbatum* (Ophidiiformes, Ophidiidae) dans la Méditerranée occidentale.

Cinq exemplaires de *Ophidion barbatum* (Ophidiidae) ont été capturés entre 200-500 m de profondeur, ce qui constitue un record pour cette espèce, connue jusqu'à présent à des profondeurs inférieures à 200 m en Méditerranée occidentale.

Key words. - Ophidiidae - *Ophidion barbatum* - MED - Depth record.

The cusk-eel, *Ophidion barbatum* L., 1758, is a sand-dwelling species found in the eastern Atlantic (from the south of England to Senegal) and in the Mediterranean. According to Nielsen (1986), it is a benthic species, which inhabits depths from a few to 150 m.

The aim of the MEDITS programme is to collect specific data about number, weight and biological measurements for 30 target species, and more general data for the other species caught, in order to obtain relative abundance and biomass indices, and to analyse annual bathymetric and geographic changes. The programme follows the Bertrand *et al.* (2002) methodology and the same positions are visited each year. We have analyzed all the data concerning *Ophidion barbatum* catches from the 1994 to the 2003 MEDITS campaigns.

The present note reports the discovery of 5 individuals at depths between 200 and 500 m, during bottom trawl surveys of the MEDITS programme (Tab. I). Until now, the presence of this species below 200 m was not known in the western Mediterranean, whereas a new record has very recently been reported by Goren and Galil (2002) in the eastern Mediterranean: the finding of an individual at a depth of 1456 m (13.5 cm total length). Goren and Galil (1997) had also suggested that more than half of the deep-sea fishes in the Levant Basin inhabit shallower habitats in the western Mediterranean.

Table I. - Exceptional depth catches of *Ophidion barbatum* from MEDITS trawl surveys; TL: total length. [Profondeurs exceptionnelles de capture de *Ophidion barbatum* provenant des sondages au chalut MEDITS.]

TL of individuals	Medium trawl depth	Year	Time	Place	Latitude	Longitude
12 cm	314 m	1995	6:30	Garrucha	36°50.17'N	1°52.65'W
13 cm	314 m	1995	6:30	Garrucha	36°50.17'N	1°52.65'W
12 cm	269 m	1995	9:50	Garrucha	37°05.37'N	1°47.63'W
16 cm	467 m	1996	12:53	Málaga	36°28.67'N	4°16.75'W
12 cm	336 m	1996	13:03	Almeria	36°39.64'N	2°24.65'W

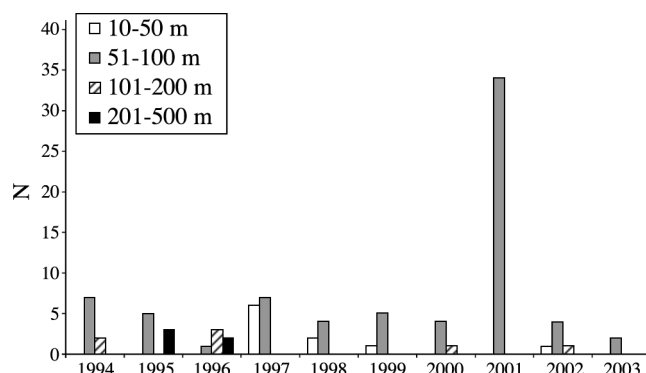


Figure 1. - Bathymetric distribution of the total number of individuals of *Ophidion barbatum* caught in MEDITS surveys. [Distribution bathymétrique du nombre total de spécimens d'*Ophidion barbatum* capturés par les sondages MEDITS.]

The largest individual caught in the area was a male of 25.3 cm TL (Matallanas, 1980), and according to Casadevall *et al.* (1996) the larger specimens of *Ophidion barbatum* were always found at shallow depths. After reviewing 10 years of *O. barbatum* catches over the MEDITS programme, data basically confirmed the previously reported distribution. In the western Mediterranean, as it could be seen in figure 1, this species usually occupies shallower waters, between 51 and 100 m (stratum B).

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(1) Àrea de Zoologia, Departament de Ciències Ambientals, Universitat de Girona, Campus de Montilivi, 17071 Girona, SPAIN. [rosa.hernandez@udg.es]

(2) Departamento de Pesquerías, Instituto Español Oceanografía, 29640 Fuengirola, (Malaga) SPAIN.

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