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FIRST RECORD OF OILFISH, *RUVETTUS PRETIOSUS* (ACTINOPTERYGII, GEMPYLIDAE), OFF THE COAST OF BENGHAZI, LIBYA (SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN)

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Abstract. The first record of oilfish, *Ruvettus pretiosus* Cocco, 1829, (Gempylidae) from the depth of 65 m, caught off the coast of Benghazi, Libya (Southern Mediterranean), is reported herewith. The present finding appears to be an evidence of the extension in the latitude of its geographical distribution.

Keywords: fish, oilfish, Ruvettus pretiosus, first record, Mediterranean, Libya

The oilfish, *Ruvettus pretiosus* Cocco, 1829, is an oceanic, benthopelagic species, found world wide in tropical and warm temperate seas, generally living at depths between 100 and 700 m in the open ocean (Nakamura and Parin 1993). It lives in pairs or solitary and migrates far offshore (Anonymous 1994, Nakamura and Parin 2001, Maguire et al. 2006). It feeds on variety of fish, crustaceans, and squids. The flesh is very oily contains a strong purgative substance that may cause diarrhoea if too much is eaten (Nakamura and Parin 1993).

The occurrence of the oilfish in the Mediterranean basin was recorded by Kaya and Bilecenoğlu (1999) at the coast of Turkey. The species was also successively reported from the Italian coast at the Adriatic Sea (Bettoso and Dulčić 1999). In this short note, the first record of the oilfish, R. pretiosus, in Libyan waters is reported herewith.

The specimen of *R. pretiosus* was caught in March 2004, by a commercial bottom trawl, 7 nautical miles off the coast of Benghazi, southern Mediterranean, Libya (32°06´N; 20°03´E; Fig. 1), at the depth of approximately 65 m. The fish was frozen on board by the fisherman. Once in the laboratory, the specimen was photographed (Fig. 2) and identified based on Nakamura and Parin (1993), and is now deposited in Natural Museum of the Zoology Department, Faculty of Science, Garyounis University, Benghazi, Libya. The main morphometric and meristic data are shown in Table 1.

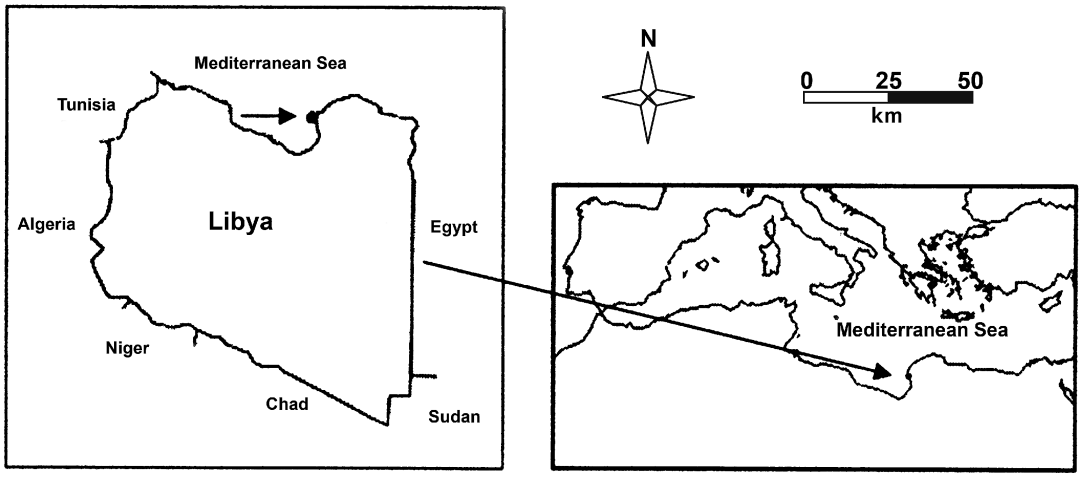

Fig. 1. Map showing where the herein reported specimen of *Ruvettus pretiosus* was collected off Benghazi, Libya

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Fig. 2. The author, holding *Ruvettus pretiosus*; inset shows head of the specimen

Table 1.

Morphological and meristic data for the specimen of *Ruvettus pretiosus* caught in Libyan waters

Morphometric data	Empirical value	Relative value [% of total length]
Total length [cm]	131	100
Standard length [cm]	114	87.02
Fork length [cm]	123	93.89
Anal length [cm]	79	60.30
Predorsal length [cm]	31	23.66
Head length [cm]	34	25.95
Maxillary length [cm]	18	13.74
Snout length [cm]	13.5	10.30
Eye diameter [cm]	6	4.58
Preorbital space [cm]	9	6.87
Dorsal fin base length [cm]	71	54.19
Anal fin base length [cm]	23.5	17.93
Pelvic fin length [cm]	9.5	7.25
Caudal fin length [cm]	14	10.68
Anal height [cm]	19	14.50
Body height [cm]	24.5	18.70
Total weight [g]	16 757	
Meristic data		
Dorsal fin rays	XIII + 15	
Pelvic fin rays	I + 5	
Pectoral fin rays	15	
Anal fin rays	18	

The specimen was 131 cm long (TL) and it weighed 16 757 g. Body semifusiform, dark- brown with lighter sides and belly. Skin very rough, scales interspersed with spinous bony tubercles. Lower jaw extends slightly anterior to upper jaw. Sharp teeth present in both jaws; in addition to uniserial small teeth on vomer and palatines. Belly keeled by bony scales between pelvic fins and anus.

Over the last decade several investigators have reported the occurrence of new fish species in the Mediterranean basin (Dulčić and Grbec 2000, Dulčić et al. 2006). Thus, the most likely possibility for the current finding is that arrived to Libyan coast by active migration or arrived as a refugee hidden inside fouling of a ship.

The finding of this species in Libyan waters is a new evidence of the extension in latitude of its geographical distribution. It could be also a sign of climate changes, and water warming. The occurrence of this species in depth of 65 m can be essential indicator of environmental changes.

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