

THE FIRST OCCURRENCE OF THE LESSEPSIAN FISH IMMIGRANT *PEMPHERIS VANICOLENSIS* IN TERRITORIAL GREEK WATERS

by

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The number of Lessepsian immigrants colonizing the Eastern Mediterranean increased continuously. BEN TUVIA (1983) reported that 41 new species reached the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal. The number of new species getting there every year rose since 1902, when the first new species made its appearance (TILLIER, 1902). *Pempheris vanicolensis* was recorded for the first time in the Mediterranean Sea in 1978, almost simultaneously off the coast of Lebanon and Israel. MOUNEIMNE (1979) mentioned four specimens under the name of *P. molucca* which most probably represent the same species (GOLANI and BEN TUVIA, 1986). WEBER and BEAUFORT (1936) reported that, in the Indian and Pacific oceans the genus *Pempheris* is spread as far as Singapore, New Guinea and the Philippines.

No *Pempheris* species has been recorded in the Aegean Sea. Hence, its finding off the northern coast of Kastellorizo and Ro islands presents particular interest, since this shows its quick spreading. It is remarkable that, in a relatively short time, this Red Sea immigrant has grown to such a population as to occupy all the coasts of Israel and Lebanon and reach the Dodecanese islands.

In July 1986, during a research project initiated by the National Centre for marine research in the Kastellorizo islands area, five specimens of *Pempheris vanicolensis* were caught with a trammel net. They showed the following morphometric and meristic characters:

1. Morphometric characters:

— Total length	120.0 - 147.0mm
— Standard length	105.0 - 128.0mm
— Head length	30.0 - 37.2mm

Morphometric characters in % of standard length.

— Preanal length	44.5 - 50.2
— Predorsal length	32.8 - 35.2
— Head length	25.0 - 28.6
— Head depth	27.0 - 30.4
— Body depth	40.5 - 43.2
— Length of pectoral fins (P)	26.8 - 29.1

— Length of anal fin (A)	44.9 - 50.0
— Length of dorsal fin (D)	15.1 - 17.2
Morphometric characters in % of head length.	
— Diameter of orbit	43.0 - 46.1
— Preorbital length	16.3 - 19.0
— Interorbital width	29.7 32.3
2. Meristic characters.	
— Dorsal rays	VI, 9
— Pectoral rays	14 - 15
— Anal rays	III, 38 - 40
— Scales on L.I.	52 - 55

The above meristic characters are similar to specimens from the coast of Israel (GOLANI, pers. comun.).

The colour (preserved) of the body was light-brown. Head and back somewhat darker, inferiorly lighter or silvery; dorsal with dark brown top; anal anteriorly with brown top or its front border occasionally brown edged, as also caudal. The fins were light brown and sometimes colourless.

Further observations in the Kastellorizo island area revealed that the fish is common over rocky bottom in relatively shallow waters; but it presents no commercial interest. The main fishes caught in the trammel net with *Pempheris vanicolensis* were: *Holocentrus ruber*, *Sparisoma cretenses*, *Mullus surmuletus*, *Siganus luridus*, *Siganus rivulatus*, *Serranus scriba*, *Serranus cabrilla*, *Synodus saurus*, *Boops boops*, *Scorpaena scrofa*, *Scorpaena porcus*, *Xyrichthys novacula*, *Phycis phycis*, and *Pagellus acarne*.

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