

**SHORT COMMUNICATION**

**First observation of the longfin batfish *Platax teira* (Forsskål, 1775) in Libyan waters**

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**Abstract**

The longfin batfish *Platax teira* (Forsskål, 1775), a species native to the Indo-West Pacific, is reported for the first time from Libyan waters. A single specimen was documented through video evidence during a night spearfishing dive at Ras Lanuf (approx. 30.5°N, 18.5°E), Gulf of Sirte, on 9 July 2025 at a depth exceeding 10 meters. This observation represents the first observation record of *P. teira* along the southern Mediterranean coast and extends the known distribution of this non-indigenous species westward from previous records in Türkiye and Ashdod (eastern Mediterranean). The possible introduction pathways and ecological implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** Citizen science, Ehippidae, Gulf of Sirte, non-indigenous species (NIS), Mediterranean

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The Mediterranean Sea has experienced a significant increase in the number of non-indigenous species (NIS) over recent decades, with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 representing the primary pathway for Indo-Pacific species to enter the basin (Zenetos *et al.* 2010; Crocetta *et al.* 2021). Among these non-indigenous species, the family Ehippidae (spadefishes and batfishes) has been represented in Mediterranean waters by *Platax teira* (Forsskål, 1775), commonly known as the longfin batfish or teira batfish.

*Platax teira* is native to the Indo-West Pacific region, ranging from the Red Sea and East Africa to Papua New Guinea, north to the Ryukyu Islands, and south to Australia (Carpenter and Robertson 2019). The species typically inhabits shallow coastal habitats and deeper offshore waters, where it is commonly found near reefs, floating debris, and artificial structures. Adults can reach up to 60–70 cm

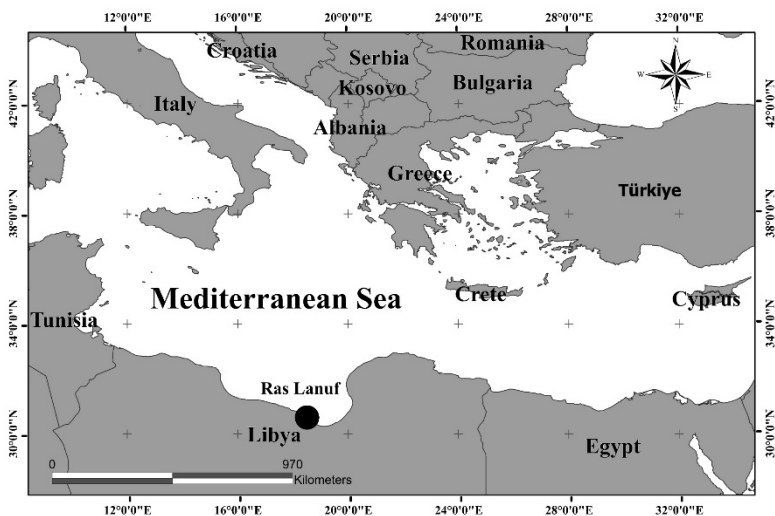
in total length and are characterized by a disc-shaped, laterally compressed body with a dark blotch under the pectoral fin (Froese and Pauly 2024).

The first Mediterranean record of *P. teira* was documented in 2006 from Bodrum, Türkiye, in the southern Aegean Sea, where a single specimen of 38.9 cm standard length was captured by spearfishing (Bilecenoglu and Kaya 2006). A second specimen (242 mm standard length) was subsequently recorded in 2010 from Ashdod coast, caught by trammel net at 8 m depth (Golani *et al.* 2011). These records, along with subsequent observations documented through 2021, have confirmed the ongoing occurrence of this species as a non-indigenous fish in the eastern Mediterranean (Zenetos *et al.* 2022).

Libyan coastal waters, extending approximately 2,000 km along the southern Mediterranean, have received increasing attention regarding marine biological invasions in recent years (Bazairi *et al.* 2013; Corsini-Foka *et al.* 2021). Knowledge on NIS introduced to Libyan waters has been expanding through intensified research efforts and the enhanced contribution of citizen science (Al Mabruk *et al.* 2021a; Tiralongo *et al.* 2022). Previous studies have documented various alien fish species along the Libyan coast, including *Siganus luridus*, *Siganus rivulatus*, *Fistularia commersonii*, *Lagocephalus sceleratus*, and the lionfish *Pterois* spp. (Al Mabruk and Rizgalla 2019; Shakman 2019; Al Mabruk *et al.* 2021b). Here, we report the first observation of *P. teira* in Libyan waters, representing a significant westward extension of this species' distribution in the Mediterranean.

A single specimen of *Platax teira* was observed and recorded on video during a night spearfishing dive conducted by Abdelrazeg Sultan at Ras Lanuf (approximately 30.5°N, 18.5°E), located on the Gulf of Sirte coast, Libya (Figure 1). The observation was made on 9 July 2025 at a depth exceeding 10 meters. The specimen was not collected, but video documentation was obtained (Figure 2), allowing for morphological identification. Species identification was confirmed based on diagnostic features described in the literature (Bilecenoglu and Kaya 2006; Golani *et al.* 2011; Froese and Pauly 2024).

The observed specimen exhibited all diagnostic characteristics of *Platax teira*: a disc-shaped, laterally compressed body with a roughly circular outline; silvery-grey to brownish coloration; coloration consistent with the presence of dark vertical banding characteristic of the species; and a prominent dark blotch beneath the pectoral fin. The latter feature is a key diagnostic character distinguishing *P. teira* from the congeneric *P. orbicularis*, which lacks this marking. The specimen appeared to be a subadult or adult individual based on body proportions observed in the video footage. The fish was encountered during nocturnal hours, consistent with the known behavior of this species, which tends to be more active at night.



**Figure 1.** Map of the Mediterranean Sea showing the location of Ras Lanuf (black dot), Gulf of Sirte, Libya, where *Platax teira* was recorded.

This observation represents the first observation record of *Platax teira* in Libyan waters and along the southern Mediterranean coast. The present record significantly extends the known distribution of this species in the Mediterranean basin westward from previous records in Türkiye (Bilecenoglu and Kaya 2006) and Ashdod (Golani *et al.* 2011), suggesting continued range expansion or multiple introduction events.

The introduction pathway of *P. teira* into the Mediterranean remains uncertain. While the species is considered a Lessepsian migrant that likely entered through the Suez Canal, aquarium releases have also been proposed as a possible vector, particularly for the initial Turkish record (Bilecenoglu and Kaya 2006). The aquarium trade represents a recognized pathway for Ehippidae introductions, as these distinctive fish are sought after as juveniles in the ornamental fish trade but frequently released into the wild once they exceed the capacity of home aquaria (Bariche *et al.* 2020).

The occurrence of *P. teira* in the Gulf of Sirte, south-central Mediterranean, is noteworthy given the geographic position of this area. The warm water temperatures characteristic of this region may provide suitable conditions for the establishment of thermophilic Indo-Pacific species. The Gulf of Sirte has previously been identified as a zone where various Lessepsian species have been recorded, reflecting the favorable environmental conditions for non-indigenous warm-water species (Bazairi *et al.* 2013; Shakman 2019; Corsini-Foka *et al.* 2021).



**Figure 2.** Video frame capture of *Platax teira* (Forsskål, 1775) observed during a night dive at Ras Lanuf (approx. 30.5°N, 18.5°E), Gulf of Sirte, Libya, on 9 July 2025.

Photo by Abdelrazeg Sultan

The footage is available at: <https://youtu.be/ITxndfCUfmU>

Whether *P. teira* has established a reproducing population in Libyan waters or whether this observation represents a vagrant individual cannot be determined from a single record. Additional monitoring efforts are needed to assess the establishment status and population dynamics of this species along the Libyan coast. Given the species' omnivorous feeding habits and habitat flexibility, continued expansion in Mediterranean waters remains possible.

The contribution of citizen science has proven invaluable for monitoring alien species in the Mediterranean, particularly in understudied regions such as the Libyan coast (Al Mabruk *et al.* 2021a; Tiralongo *et al.* 2022). The increasing number of alien fish species documented from Libyan waters underscores the importance of continued monitoring programs in this understudied region of the Mediterranean. Citizen science observations, such as the present record obtained

through recreational diving activities, represent valuable contributions to the documentation of marine biodiversity changes in the region. Social media platforms have proven particularly effective for gathering occurrence data on alien species in North African waters (Al Mabruk *et al.* 2020).

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**Author contributions:** S.A.A.A. collected the data, identified the species, and wrote the manuscript.

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