

Short communication

First confirmed record of *Lappanella fasciata* (Cocco, 1833) in the Adriatic Sea

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Introduction

The family Labridae is represented by 8 species in the Adriatic Sea (Jardas, 1996), but the status and presence of some of them in the region are completely unknown (Šoljan, 1948; Milišić, 1994). *Lappanella fasciata* (Cocco, 1833) is a subtropical marine reef associated species inhabiting the Eastern Atlantic (including Madeira) and the Mediterranean at depths between 35 and 200 m (Quignard and Pras, 1986). It is found in deep rocky areas, and feeds on crabs, gastropods and polychaetes (Quignard and Pras, 1986). There are still no confirmed records that this species truly occurs in the Adriatic Sea (Šoljan, 1948, 1975; Milišić, 1994).

As a result of our investigations, the labrid *L. fasciata* (Cocco, 1833) can now be added to the Adriatic checklist of fishes.

Materials and methods

Between 1984 and 2005, a total 503 dives using SCUBA equipment was undertaken in the area around the Island of Sušac (eastern middle Adriatic, Croatia; Fig. 1). The bedrock reef is approximately 70 m in depth, with a few 10 m deep reef cliffs and some of almost 100 m depth. The environment where *L. fasciata* has been found is inhabited mainly by gorgonians *Paramuricea clavata* and *Gerardia savaglia* on the east side of the reef, with *Eunicela cavolini* dominating the west side. Four specimens were photographed with a Nikon F5 (105/2.8 mm AF Micro-Nikkor camera; the lens permits macro-photography scale reading and thus the reading of meristic characters with good approximation; Seacam housing, Seacam 200 TTL flash, Ektachrome 100 VS film). Several specimens of *L. fasciata* were observed from 30 July to 2 August 2005 in the south-eastern part of Sušac Island (Cape Triščavac) in the 65–77 m depth range (Table 1). On the first dive of 30 July 2005 an approximately 10 cm long specimen was photographed at a depth of 68 m (Fig. 2). During subsequent dives, observations and photographs of the species were intentionally sought in other areas of the site. All reports represent the first confirmed records of *L. fasciata* for the entire Adriatic Sea.

Results and Discussion

The Adriatic *L. fasciata* specimen has an elongated body somewhat compressed laterally and covered with rather large scales. The head has scales, except for the pointed snout (with some scales between the eyes). The mouth is rather large. The

upper part of the body is orange in colour. There is a dark blotch is on the dorsal fin at the end of the spiny part and the beginning of the soft part. Another blotch is on the upper part of the caudal peduncle. There is a small dark spot on the mid-part of the caudal fin. The lower part of the body is whitish, with four to five orange bands. Meristic data of the specimen are: dorsal finrays XVI + 9; anal finrays III + 10. On the basis of colouration, body description and meristic characteristics, the photographed specimen was identified as *L. fasciata*. All descriptions and meristic characteristics are in good agreement with the data proposed by Quignard and Pras (1986).

Kosić (1889) noted the Croatian name for this species, with no further mention of the record and sampling area in the Adriatic. It is questionable whether the mention of the common name is proof that this species really did occur in the Adriatic Sea. Ninni (1912) did not include this species in the list of Adriatic fishes; Caporiacco (1921) noted the presence of *L. fasciata*, but also did not provide a record of the data (date, location, photo). Šoljan (1948, 1975) reported that this species was probably never recorded in the Adriatic Sea. Jardas (1996) included this species on the list, on the basis of some previously unconfirmed citations as noted above. Since this species occurs in deep, rocky areas, one could potentially argue that it probably escaped observation by divers or was not collected with the available fishing gear. This is potentially

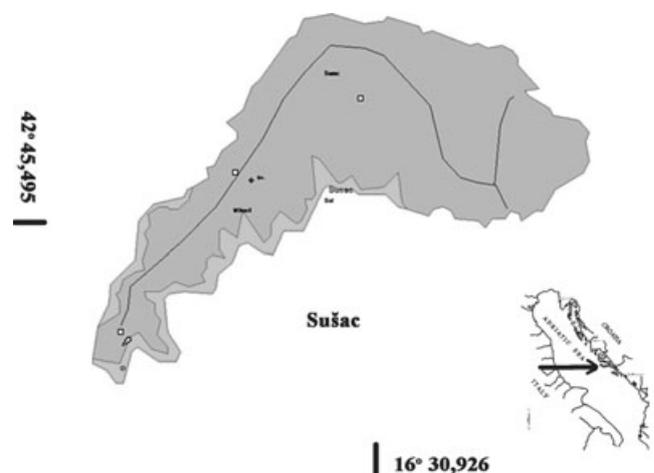


Fig. 1. Area map of observed and photographed *Lappanella fasciata* specimens (Sušac Island, eastern middle Adriatic)

Table 1
Observation data of *Lapanella fasciata* specimens off Sušac Island (Adriatic Sea)

Date	Locus	Depth range (m)	Observed number of specimens	Estimated size (total length in cm)
30 July 2005	Cape Triščavac	68	1	10
31 July 2005	Cape Triščavac	68–70	4	5, 7, 7, 12
1 August 2005	Cape Triščavac	70–74	1	10
2 August 2005	Cape Triščavac	65–77	4	5, 7, 10, 12

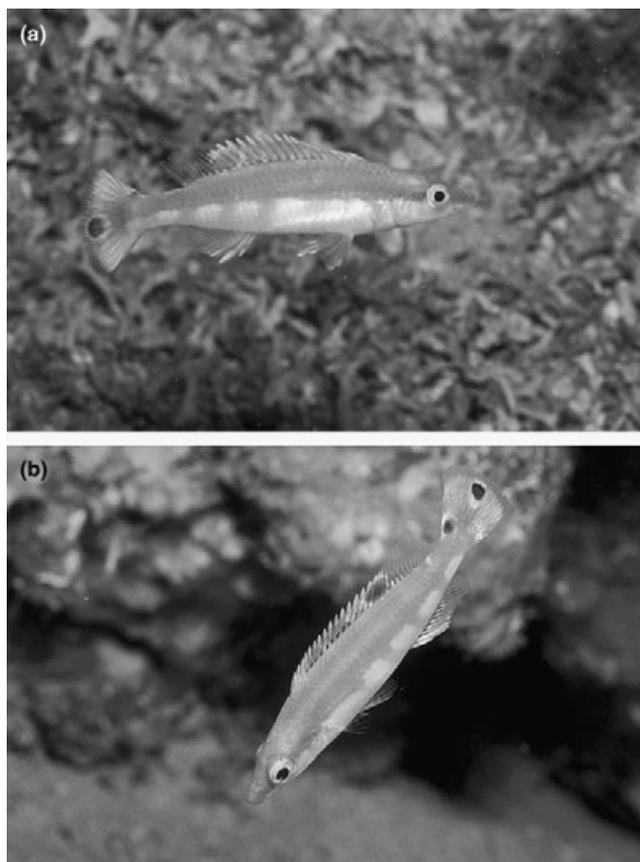


Fig. 2. Photograph of *Lapanella fasciata* specimen

one reason that *L. fasciata* was overlooked. Several authors have argued (e.g. Colterill and Dangerfield, 1997) that species checklists without voucher specimens are pseudoscientific records because their inventory identification cannot be tested. In our opinion, photographic evidence of rare species together with recorded meristic and morphometric data are very important for providing evidence for comparative purposes with regard to rare records. However, photographs can only serve as additional evidence for records when the considered species is positively identified according to shape, colouration and meristic characteristics. For example, only a limited number of gobiid species can be identified in this way; published records based on photographs are very rare, as in Ballesta et al. (1998) on *Didogobius schlieveni*. This present record is further evidence of the importance of new techniques associated with SCUBA equipment, which allows the detection of rare or lesser-known fish species in otherwise inaccessible habitats.

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