

# ANNALES

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*Annali di Studi istriani e mediterranee*  
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## RANGE EXPANSION OF *SYNODUS RANDALLI* CRESSEY, 1981 IN THE NORTHEASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper reports the expansion of the distribution range of Randall's lizardfish *Synodus randalli* in the northeastern Mediterranean Sea. On 20 January 2024, a single specimen of *S. randalli* was caught by a commercial trawl net in Mersin Bay. The occurrence of this species on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey is probably due to its migration from the Red Sea via the Suez Canal. It appears that this species has spread rapidly in a short period of time and may establish itself in the eastern Mediterranean in the near future. This ichthyological note is important as it represents the second consecutive record of the species from the Turkish waters of the northeastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, the present record indicates a westward migration of *S. randalli* in the Mediterranean. This study also contributes important information on the maximum standard length of the species to the FishBase database.*

**Key words:** Synodontidae, Randall's Lizardfish, Spread, Mersin Bay, Turkey

## ESPANSIONE DELL'AREALE DI *SYNODUS RANDALLI* CRESSEY, 1981 NEL MEDITERRANEO NORD-ORIENTALE

### SINTESI

*Il presente lavoro riporta l'espansione dell'areale di distribuzione di *Synodus randalli* nel Mediterraneo nord-orientale. Il 20 gennaio 2024, un singolo esemplare di *S. randalli* è stato catturato da una rete da traino commerciale nella baia di Mersin. La presenza di questa specie lungo la costa mediterranea della Turchia è probabilmente dovuta alla sua migrazione dal Mar Rosso attraverso il Canale di Suez. Sembra che questa specie si sia diffusa rapidamente in un breve periodo di tempo e che possa stabilirsi nel Mediterraneo orientale nel prossimo futuro. Questa nota ittiologica è importante perché rappresenta il secondo ritrovamento consecutivo della specie dalle acque turche del Mediterraneo nord-orientale. La presente segnalazione inoltre indica una migrazione verso ovest di *S. randalli* nel Mediterraneo. Questo studio contribuisce anche a fornire importanti informazioni sulla lunghezza massima standard della specie per il database di FishBase.*

**Parole chiave:** Synodontidae, *Synodus randalli*, diffusione, baia di Mersin, Turchia

## INTRODUCTION

The genus *Synodus* Scopoli, 1777 consists of 47 species distributed across tropical and subtropical regions of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans (Froese & Pauly, 2024; Fricke et al., 2024). This genus belongs to the family Synodontidae and is commonly referred to as “Lizardfish”. Lizardfish usually live in shallow waters at depths of 0–140 m in various habitats, such as coral and marine reefs, sandy and sand-rock bottoms (Randall et al., 1990). Lizardfish are strictly carnivorous and mainly feed on other fish (Froese & Pauly, 2024).

In the Red Sea, the genus *Synodus* is represented by five species (Golani & Fricke, 2018). *Synodus randalli* Cressey, 1981 was previously reported from the Red Sea by Baranes & Golani (1993) as *Synodus doaki* (Randall, 2009). Although this species was previously only known in the Red Sea, it was first reported from the Mediterranean Sea in 2023 by Langeneck et al. (2023).

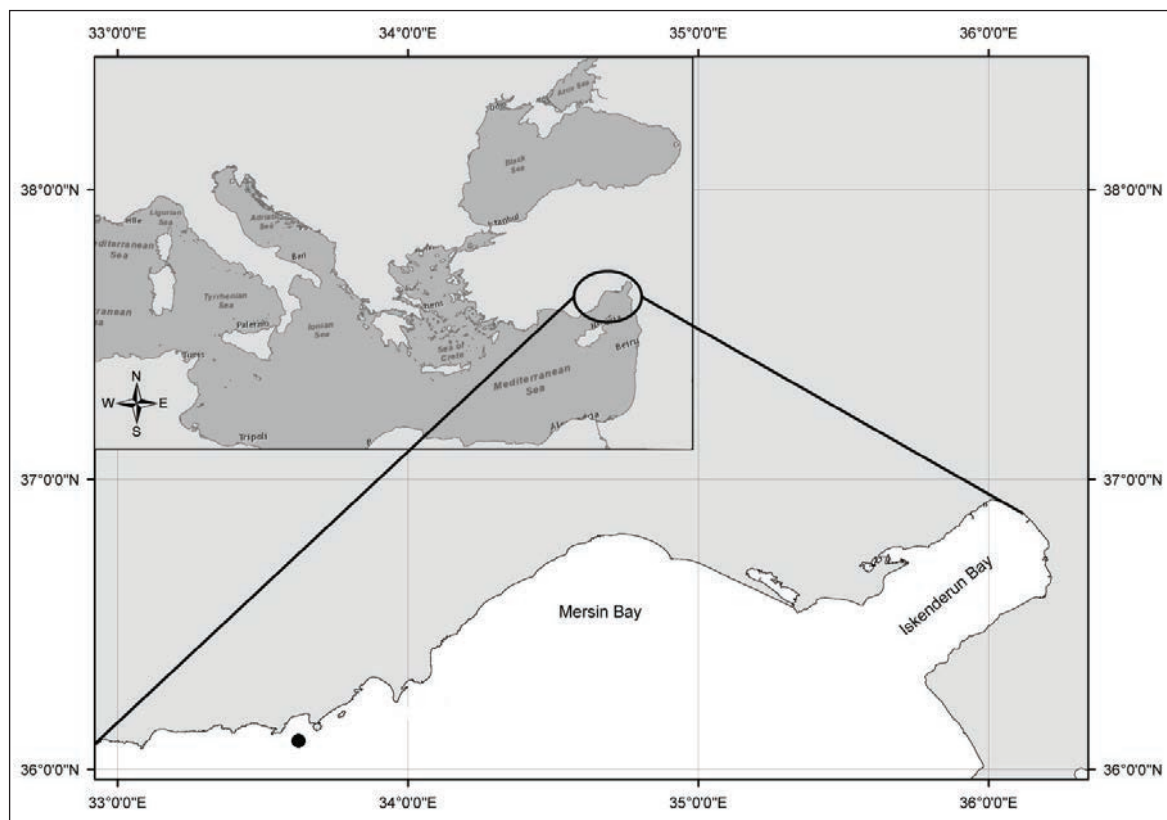
To date, three lizardfish species have been known from the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, one of these, *Synodus saurus* (Linnaeus, 1758), is of Atlantic origin (IUCN, 2024), while the other two species, *Saurida lessepsianus* Russell, Golani & Tikochinski 2015 and

*S. randalli* Cressey, 1981, are of Indo-Pacific origin. All three species are non-native species that migrated to the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal (Russell et al., 2015).

This study reports a further range expansion of *S. randalli* from the northern coast of the Levant Basin, Mersin Bay, with the present record indicating a westward migration along the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. The presence of Randall’s lizardfish in the northeastern Mediterranean likely indicates the potential of this species to spread throughout the Mediterranean basin and highlights its ability to adapt and colonize new environments.

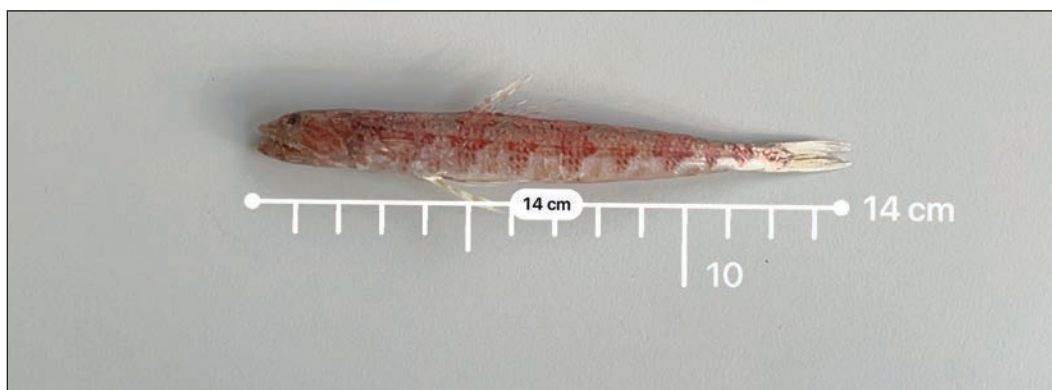
## MATERIAL AND METHODS

On 20 January 2024, a single specimen of *S. randalli* was caught with a trawl net at a depth of 105 m off Yeşilovacık Bay, Mersin Bay (at 36°02′39″ N, 33°36′47″ E) (Fig. 1). The fresh specimen was photographed and transported to the laboratory for identification. The characteristics of the present specimen (Fig. 2) correspond to the description provided by Cressey (1981). Some morphological measurements were made and recorded (Table 1). The specimen was fixed



**Fig. 1:** Map showing the capture site (black circle) of the *Synodus randalli* specimen.

**Sl. 1:** Zemljevid obravnavanega območja z lokaliteto (črni krogec) ulova primerka vrste *Synodus randalli*.



**Fig. 2:** *Synodus randalli* Cressey, 1981 in Mersin Bay (northeastern Mediterranean, Turkey).  
**Sl. 2:** *Synodus randalli* Cressey, 1981 iz zaliva Mersin (severovzhodno Sredozemsko morje, Turčija).

in 4% buffered formalin and deposited in the Mersin University Marine Life Museum with catalog number MEUFC-24-11-145.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The captured Mediterranean specimen of *S. randalli* measured 140 mm in total length (TL), 119 mm in standard length, and weighed 18.40 g in total weight. It exhibited the following morphological features: body fusiform, head somewhat depressed, caudal side a little compressed; scales large and cycloid, covering cheeks, operculum and postoral portion of cheeks; a long triangular flap on the anterior nares and no conspicuous black pigmented area on the operculum; snout sharply pointed, broader than long; pectoral fin reaching beyond the line from base of pelvic fin to origin of dorsal fin; outer pelvic ray unbranched and short, fifth branched ray (sixth ray) longest (Cressey, 1981).

The meristic and morphometric characteristics of the specimen are given in Table 1 and compared with previous Red Sea (Cressey, 1981) and Mediterranean records (Langeneck *et al.*, 2023). Color (fresh specimen): a series of reddish brown saddle-like bands found in the body. Dorsal fin with 3 to 4 similarly colored bars, a conspicuous spot exhibited on the adipose fin.

Randall's lizardfish *S. randalli* is distributed in the western Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, in South Africa, Madagascar, Tanzania, and Sudan (Cressey, 1981; Randall, 2009; Fricke *et al.*, 2018; Bogorodsky & Randall, 2019).

*S. randalli* is a demersal species inhabiting relatively deep waters. Cressey (1981) and Randall (2009) reported a depth range of 6–146 metres for *S. randalli*. However, according to the IUCN (2024), the depth distribution of adults is likely deeper, ranging from about 50 to 150 m. Similarly, the single

Mediterranean specimen reported in this study was observed at a depth of 80 m. This depth range aligns with the literature (Cressey, 1981; Langeneck *et al.*, 2023).

Cressey (1981) and Randall (2009) reported a maximum standard length (SL) of 11.3 cm for this species. However, in this study and one previous study (Langeneck *et al.*, 2023), the standard length of this species in the Mediterranean Sea appears to be longer than previously recorded. These new findings are significant and should be considered updates to databases like FishBase. Therefore, the present study contributes new information that is valuable to scientists studying this species.

Langeneck *et al.* (2023) suggest that the species could have been transported to the Mediterranean with ballast waters, but this new finding strengthens the hypothesis that it likely entered the Mediterranean waters through the Suez Canal. In addition, trawlers have reported more frequent sightings of this species in trawl nets in the region lately (personal communication).

The presence of *S. randalli* on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey is likely due to the species' migration from the Red Sea through the Suez Canal. To date, numerous fish species have entered the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal (Cinar *et al.*, 2021; Golani *et al.*, 2020).

It appears that *S. randalli* is rapidly spreading towards the southern Aegean coast of Turkey and will likely colonize the eastern Mediterranean in a short time. As the number of specimens increases, it is also likely that *S. randalli* will accelerate its ability to adapt and further colonize the Mediterranean basin in the near future. This ichthyological note is significant as it represents the second record of the species in the northeastern Mediterranean waters of Turkey, indicating a westward spread of this species in Turkish Mediterranean waters.

**Tab. 1: Morphometric measurements of the *Synodus randalli* specimen collected in the northeastern Mediterranean Sea, Turkey, and comparison with previous records from the Mediterranean and Red Seas.****Tab. 1: Morfometrične meritve primerka vrste *Synodus randalli*, ujetega v severovzhodnem Sredozemskem morju, Turčija, in primerjava s podatki iz predhodnih zapisov o pojavljanju v Sredozemskem in Rdečem morju.**

Measurements (mm)	This study	Langeneck et al. (2023)	Cressey (1981)
Number of Specimen	1	1	1
Total length	140	187	-
Fork length	129	173	-
Standard length	119	161	113
Head length	31.10	45.56	31.97
Snouth length	7.22	11.21	8.13
Upper jaw length	19.37	28.81	20.22
Lower jaw length	19.06	-	-
Diameter of bony orbit	5.77	11.02	7.68
Least width of bony interorbital	3.55	7.39	3.95
Pre-dorsal fin origin	48.01	66.91	49.72
Pre-adipose origin	94.45	133.79	93.90
Pre-anal fin origin	94.22	133.62	92.88
Pre-pelvic fin origin	41.64	55.80	43.61
Pre-pectoral fin origin	31.88	41.80	40.11
Eye diameter	4.59	6.22	-
Interorbital distance	7.34	-	-
Counts			
Dorsal fin rays	13	13	13
Anal fin rays	8	8	8
Pectoral fin rays	12	12	12
Pelvic fin rays	8	8	8
Caudal fin rays	16	-	-
Lateral line scales	56	58	55
Weight	18.40	51.89	-

## CONCLUSIONS

Although the presence of a second specimen off the Levantine coast suggests that the most likely migration route is the Suez Canal and that the species' distribution will expand in the Mediterranean, it remains unclear whether the species can establish a population in the Levant Basin. Therefore, more

data and monitoring studies are needed to confirm this hypothesis.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ŠIRJENJE AREALA RANDALLJEVEGA MORSKEGA KUŠČARJA *SYNODUS RANDALLI* CRESSEY, 1981 V SEVEROVZHODNO SREDOZEMSKO MORJE

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### POVZETEK

*Avtorji poročajo o širjenju območja razširjenosti Randalljevega morskega kuščarja *Synodus randalli* v severovzhodno Sredozemsko morje. Dvajsetega januarja 2024 so v povlečno mrežo ulovili primerek vrste *S. randalli* v zalivu Mersin. Pojavljanje te vrste ob turški sredozemski obali je najverjetneje povezano z imigracijo iz Rdečega morja skozi Sueški prekop. Kaže, da se vrsta v kratkem časovnem obdobju hitro razširja in se bo morda v vzhodnem Sredozemskem morju v bližnji prihodnosti uveljavila. Ta ihtiološka novica je pomembna, saj predstavlja drugi zaporedni zapis o pojavljanju te vrste v turških vodah severovzhodnega Sredozemskega morja. Pričujoči zapis tudi kaže, da se vrsta *S. randalli* širi proti zahodnemu delu Sredozemskega morja. Poleg tega prispeva pomembne podatke o največji standardni dolžini telesa v podatkovno bazo FishBase.*

**Ključne besede:** Synodontidae, Randalljev morski kuščar, razširjanje, zaliv Mersin, Turčija

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