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SHARK NEWS

SHARK NEWS 12 NEWSLETTER OF THE IUCN SHARK SPECIALIST GROUP NOVEMBER 1998

Dark Clouds on Mediterranean Elasmobranchs: The Case of Endemic Skates

Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara wrote to express concern over the status of some of the 78 elasmobranch species known to occur in the Mediterranean Sea.

Lack of knowledge of many of these species, due to the absence of serious and consistent data collecting, may be conspiring with the well-known problem of overfishing in the region, particularly as far as bottom trawling is concerned, to negatively affect marine biodiversity. Many of the least common batoid species, for example, such as the Lusitanian cownose ray *Rhinoptera marginata*, the darkspotted stingray *Himantura uarnak*, and the small-tooth sawfish *Pristis pectinata*, have not been reported in the scientific literature from the Mediterranean for many years, in some cases decades.

The greatest concern obviously goes to those species which are endemic to the region, such as the maltese skate *Raja melitensis*, the speckled skate *R. polystigma*, and Rondelet's skate *R. rondeleti*, all of which may have disappeared altogether, as far as one can tell. There is an urgent need for a greater attention to elasmobranchs from fishery statisticians, a greater ability and willingness to identify specimens in the catches to the species level, and more communication among scientists working on cartilaginous fishes throughout the region.

*For more information contact:
Dr G. Notarbartolo di Sciara,
ICRAM (Istituto Centrale per la Ricerca Applicata al Mare),
via di Casalotti 300, 00166 Roma, Italy
Fax (+39) (6) 61550581. Email: disciara@tin.it*