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Tritonia nilsodhneri Marcus Ev., 1983 (Gastropoda, Heterobranchia, Tritoniidae): first records for the Adriatic Sea and new data on ecology and distribution of Mediterranean populations

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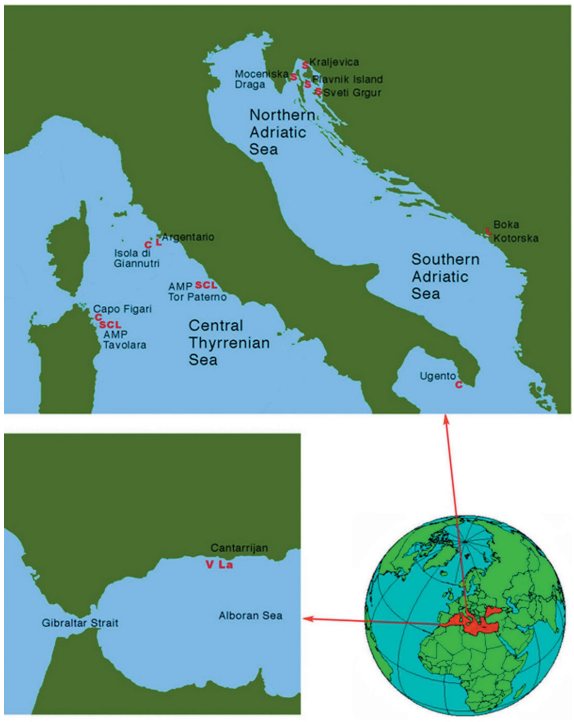
The nudibranch Tritonia nilsodhneri*, usually feeding on a variety of gorgoniacean species, is known from different localities of the eastern Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Knowledge of the host preferences of the Mediterranean populations is still scarce. Few records of this nudibranch have been reported from the eastern Mediterranean basin. With this report, the occurrence of* T. nilsodhneri *within the Mediterranean basin is extended to the Adriatic Sea. Furthermore, the list of the host species associated to the Mediterranean populations for feeding habits is increased from two up to five. Mediterranean specimens of* T. nilsodhneri *were observed for the first time feeding and spawning on* Leptogorgia sarmentosa*,* Eunicella cavolini *and* E. labiata*. Finally, these last two Gorgoniidae species are also reported here as a new host species for* T. nilsodhneri*.*

Key words: Tritoniidae, *Tritonia nilsodhneri*, Adriatic sea, *Eunicella*, *Leptogorgia*, host specificity

INTRODUCTION

The nudibranch *Tritonia nilsodhneri* Marcus Ev., 1983 was originally described as *Duvaucelia odhneri* (TARDY, 1963) from Ile de Ré (Atlantic coast of France). Afterwards it was moved to the genus *Tritonia* Cuvier, 1798 and synonymy occurred with *Tritonia odhneri* Marcus Ev., 1959, a valid species living in the eastern Pacific Ocean. For this reason, following the Principle of Priority of ICZN, the name currently in use was adopted according to MARCUS EV. (1983).

This small sized species can be considered cryptic, since its body colour usually resem-



bles that of its prey and the shape of its cerata and rhinophores mimics the polyps of the host on which it usually lives. In fact, Tritoniidae is a very specialized family with species showing a strong relationship with gorgonians and soft corals, on which they feed, mate and live (GOMEZ, 1973; MATUCHESKI & MUNIAIN, 2011). In the north eastern Atlantic Ocean, the distribution of *Tritonia nilsodhneri* extends from the British Isles to the coasts of Portugal and Spain (THOMPSON & BROWN, 1984; THOMPSON, 1988; GARCIA-GOMEZ *et al.*, 1991; PICTON & MORROW, 1994; CERVERA *et al.*, 2004). Records are also reported from South Africa (GOSLINER, 1987; ZSILAVECZ, 2007; GOSLINER *et al.*, 2008; POLA & GOSLINER, 2010). In the Mediterranean Sea it is reported from all over the Spanish coasts (CERVERA *et al.*, 2004; BALLESTEROS, 2007; BALLESTEROS *et al.*, 2012-2016; GROC, 2016). Along the Mediterranean coast of France it is reported from Banyuls (HORST, 2010), Cerbère (PODDUBETSKAIA, 2002), Sausset le pins and Carro (LE GRANCHÉ & MÜLLER, 2016). Records from Italian Seas are known for the central and southern Tyrrhenian Sea and the Ionian Sea (CATTANEO-VIETTI & GIOVINE, 2008), for the Ligurian Sea (CERRANO *et al.*, 2007) and for north eastern Sardinia (TRAINITO & DONEDDU, 2015). The easternmost record for the Mediterranean Basin is from the Turkish coasts of the Aegean Sea (YOKEŞ, 2009).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Underwater photographs, ecological notes and, when necessary, samples were obtained during scuba diving. Some individuals were observed during a field survey for ecological quantitative description of Boka Kotorska Bay marine area in Montenegro (RAC/SPA - UNEP/MAP, 2013). When collected, samples were preserved in EtOH 95% for further molecular investigations and stored in the malacological collection at the Department of Biology and Biotechnologies "Charles Darwin" ("Sapienza" University of Rome, Italy). Photographs and ecological notes were also obtained by websites and personal communications. Data on mating, spawning, feeding or other important ecological remarks in relation with the host were annotated for successive inferences. A review of the existing literature regarding the geographical and ecological niches and trophism of *T. nilsodhneri* was performed to better describe the novelty of information provided by this ecological study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Table 1 a list of the localities, data, host species, presence of egg coils of *T. nilsodhneri* cited in this study, and references are summarized. A recent updated review of the Adriatic Opisthobranch fauna does not report the species *T. nilsodhneri* from the Adriatic Sea (ZENETOS *et al.*, 2016), but based on the findings, herein reported, the presence of *T. nilsodhneri* can be extended to the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. The first report of *T. nilsodhneri* in the Adriatic Sea is dated 12/08/2000, when a specimen was photographed (a photo reported on a website) on *Eunicella singularis* (Esper, 1791) together with egg coil, at Sveti Grgur, Croatia (DE LORENZI, 2000). Afterwards, discovery of several individuals and egg coils took place in 2013 at Dražin vrt (at 15 m depth) in Boka Kotorska Bay, Montenegro on a colony of *Leptogorgia sarmentosa* (Esper, 1789) (Fig. 1a). More recent records are

Table 1. Records of Tritonia nilsodhneri *cited in this study with collection date and localities, host species name and presence/absence (on the host) of* T. nilsodhneri *egg coils and references*

Date	Locality	Basin	Host	Presence of egg coil	References
12/08/2000	Sveti Grgur, Croatia,	Northern Adriatic Sea	*Eunicella singularis*	YES	DE LORENZI, 2000
26/05/2011	Cantarrijan, Granada, Spain	Alboran Sea	*Leptogorgia sarmentosa*	NO	Present paper
27/05/2011	Cantarrijan, Granada, Spain	Alboran Sea	*Eunicella verrucosa*	NO	Present paper
17/07/2011	Cantarrijan, Granada, Spain	Alboran Sea	*Eunicella labiata*	NO	Present paper
14/06/2012	Buoy 8, MPA Secche di Tor Paterno, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	NO	Present paper
30/08/2012	Buoy 1, MPA Secche di Tor Paterno, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella singularis*	YES	Present paper
06/07/2013	Buoy 1, MPA Secche di Tor Paterno, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Leptogorgia sarmentosa*	NO	Present paper
10/04/2013	Drazn Vrt, Boka Kotorska, Montenegro	Southern Adriatic Sea	*Leptogorgia sarmentosa*	YES	RAC/SPA - UNEP/MAP, 2013
18/07/2013	Buoy 1, MPA Secche di Tor Paterno, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Leptogorgia sarmentosa*	NO	Present paper
19/07/2013	Ugento, Apulia, Italy	Ionian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	NO	Vitale, 2014
19/07/2013	Buoy 1, MPA Secche di Tor Paterno, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Leptogorgia sarmentosa*	NO	Present paper
28/07/2014	Buoy 1, MPA Secche di Tor Paterno, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Leptogorgia sarmentosa*	YES	Present paper
01/05/2014	Grottone, MPA Tavolara, Sardinia, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	YES	Present paper
06/05/2014	Occhio di Dio, MPA Tavolara, Sardinia, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	YES	Present paper
09/05/2014	Cala Cicale, MPA Tavolara, Sardinia, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	YES	Present paper
09/05/2014	Cala Cicale, MPA Tavolara, Sardinia, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella singularis*	YES	Present paper
09/06/2014	Punta Rossa, Circeo, Latium, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	YES	Present paper
02/07/2014	Kralievica, Croatia	Northern Adriatic Sea	*Eunicella singularis*	YES	Present paper
04/05/2015	Cala Cicale, MPA Tavolara, Sardinia, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	YES	Present paper
29/11/2015	Scoglio del Corallo, Argentario, Tuscany, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Leptogorgia sarmentosa*	YES	Present paper
27/12/2015	Cerniette, Giannutri Island, Tuscany, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	YES	Present paper
28/05/2016	Plavnik Island, Croatia	Northern Adriatic Sea	*Eunicella singularis*	YES	Present paper
01/09/2016	Moceniska Draga, Croatia	Northern Adriatic Sea	*Eunicella singularis*	NO	Present paper
27/09/2016	NEW02, MPA Tavolara, Sardinia, Italy	Central Tyrrhenian Sea	*Eunicella cavolini*	NO	Present paper

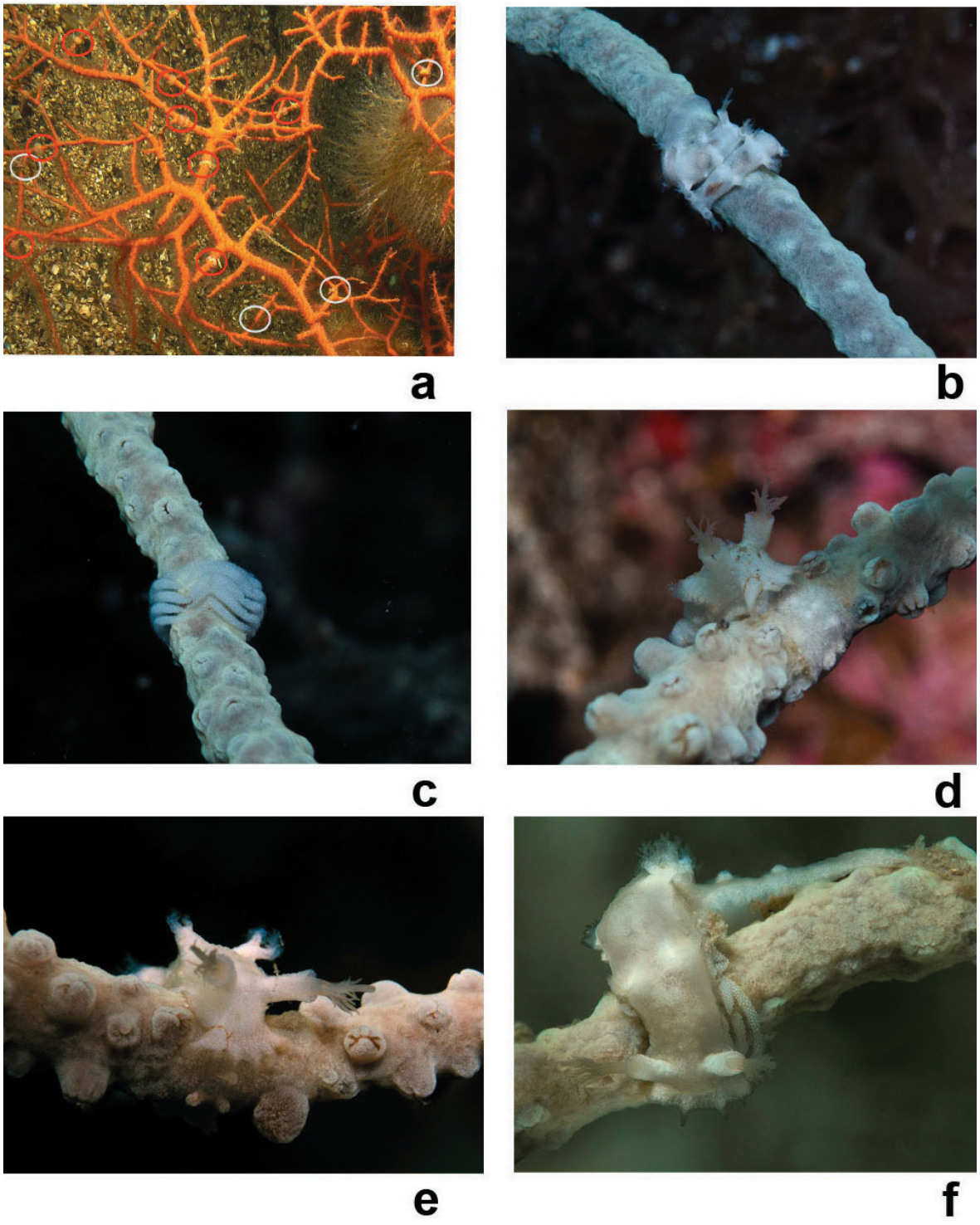


Fig. 1. a). Dražin Vrt, Boka Kotorska, Montenegro. Tritonia nilsodhneri *with egg coils on* Leptogorgia sarmentosa*. White circles indicate the nudibranchs and red circles indicate the egg coils. Photo E.T. b) & c.) Plavnik Island, Croatia.* T. nilsodhneri *and egg coils on* Eunicella singularis*. Photo M.F. d) & e) Moščenička Draga, Croatia.* T. nilsodhneri *feeding on* E. singularis*. Photo M.F. f) Kraljevica, Croatia.* T. nilsodhneri *laying eggs on* E. singularis*. Photo F.D.L.*

reported from the coasts of Croatia in different localities such as Plavnik Island (at 28 m depth) (Fig. 1b, c), Moščenička draga (at 33 m depth) (Fig. 1d, e) and Kraljevica (Fig. 1f), all on colonies of *E. singularis*, on which this dendronotacean slug was mating and feeding.

These results also corroborate the selection of *E. singularis* as the favoured prey for *T. nilsodhneri* inhabiting the Mediterranean Sea. This gorgonian species is considered endemic of the Mediterranean Sea, where it is common and widespread. Sometimes *E. stricta* (Bertoloni, 1810) has been cited as the prey of *T. nilsodhneri* (HORST, 2010), however the validity of this gorgonian species is debated: it is nowadays listed as a valid species in VAN OFWEGEN (2010) although it is commonly accepted as a synonym of *E. singularis* (CARPINE & GRASSHOFF, 1975; WEINBERG, 1976; AVIAN *et al.*, 1995). Moreover, this study reports here for the first time, three additional host species, belonging to two different gorgonian genera, that were never recorded for Mediterranean specimens of *T. nilsodhneri*: *Eunicella cavolini* (Koch, 1887), *E. labiata* Thomson, 1927 and *Leptogorgia sarmentosa*. Ecological association occurring between *T. nilsodhneri* and *E. cavolini* and *E. labiata* represents also the first ever recorded interaction among the species in the world, increasing the number of the species recognized as host for this dendronotacean to seven. Some sightings of animals living on *E. cavolini* and egg coils deposited on the same gorgonian were observed in different localities of central Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas: 'Tavolara Punta Coda Cavallo' Marine Protected Area (MPA) (Fig. 2a), also at Capo Figari (Sardinia) (R. Romor, personal communication) and at Ugento (Apulia) (VITALE, 2014) (Table 1).

The *Eunicella labiata* is an eastern Atlantic species with populations on both sides of the Gibraltar strait, reaching the coast of Granada in the Alboran Sea. *T. nilsodhneri* was found on colonies of *E. labiata* in the locality Cantarrijan (Granada) and the presence of egg coil were also documented (C. Minguell, personal communication) (Fig. 2b).

The third species identified as an additional host for Mediterranean specimens of *T. nilsodhneri*, but already reported for Atlantic populations (URGORRI & BESTEIRO, 1984), is *L. sarmentosa*. In addition to the data provided here for Montenegro, further observations on this ecological association took place in the MPA "Secche di Tor Paterno" (Fig. 2c), in the MPA "Tavolara Punta Coda Cavallo" (Tsuruoka, personal communication), at "Scoglio del Corallo" Argentario Promontory (Tuscany) and Cantarrijan (Granada) (C. Minguell, personal communication) (Fig. 2d). *E. verrucosa* (Pallas, 1766), on which *T. nilsodhneri* is cryptically camouflaged, is the main prey

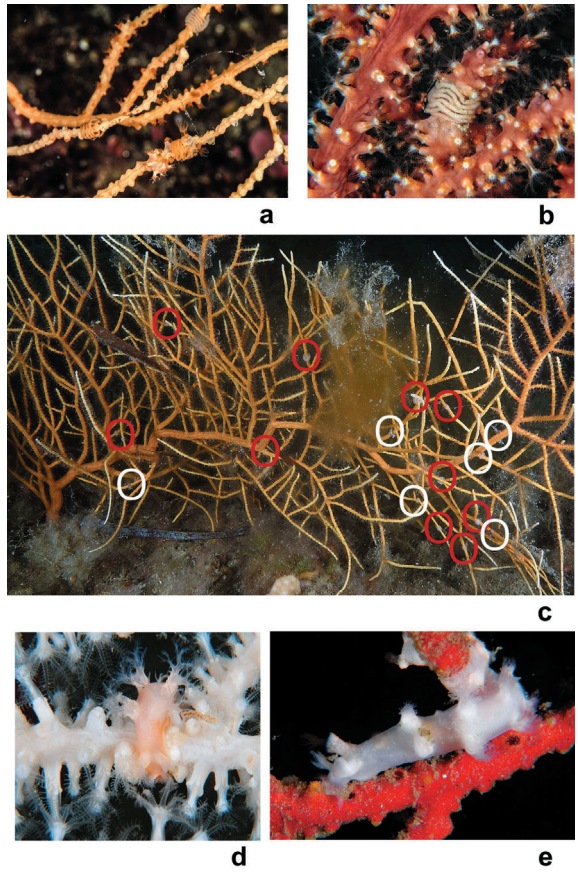


Fig. 2. a) Cala Cicale, AMP Tavolara, Sardinia, Italy. T. nilsodhneri *and eggs coils on* Eunicella cavolini. *Photo E.T. b) Cantarrijan, Granada, Spain. Egg coil of* T. nilsodhneri *on* Eunicella labiata. *Photo C. Minguell - © Courtesy OCEANA.* ***c.*** *Buoy 1, AMP Tor Paterno, Italy. c)* T. nilsodhneri *with egg coils on* L. sarmentosa. *White circles indicate the nudibranchs and red circles indicate the egg coils. Photo E.T. d.) Cantarrijan, Granada, Spain.* T. nilsodhneri *on* Eunicella verrucosa. *Photo C. Minguell. e) Cantarrijan, Granada, Spain.* T. nilsodhneri *on* L. sarmentosa. *Photo C. Minguell.*

in the north eastern Atlantic Ocean (URGORRI & BESTEIRO, 1984; THOMPSON & BROWN, 1984; THOMPSON, 1988; PICTON & MORROW, 1994; IRVING, 1996; YONOW, 1996; TODD *et al.*, 2001). Only one record of *T. nilsodhneri* feeding on *E. verrucosa* has been reported until now from the Mediterranean Sea and in particular from Portofino, Ligurian Sea (CERRANO *et al.*, 2007). New records of this interaction in the Mediterranean Sea are here reported from Cantarrijan (Granada) (C. Minguell, personal communication) (Fig. 2e). Map 1 summarizes in detail the localities where the cited findings took place.

Regarding the South African populations of *T. nilsodhneri*, the gorgonian species *E. albicans* (Kölliker, 1865) and *E. tricoronata* Velimirov, 1971 are known to be the typical preys (JONES, 2008). However, the identification of the South African population as *T. nilsodhneri* needs to be verified since the presence of differences in some morphological features could suggests a possible sister species within *T. nilsodhneri* taxon.

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of *T. nilsodhneri* in the Adriatic Sea (Mediterranean Sea) is here reported for the first time while TEMPLADO *et al.* (1983) as *Duvaucelia odhneri*, recorded it for the first time for the Mediterranean Sea. Other records of its presence in the Mediterranean can be found in BALLESTEROS *et al.* (2012-2016). The absence of *T. nilsodhneri* in the recent checklist of the Adriatic Opisthobranch fauna underlines the difficulty to detect this species and also the efficiency of its camouflage with the gorgonians it lives on.

Regarding the trophic substrate known until now for the Mediterranean populations of *T. nilsodhneri*, with this work the list of Gorgoniidae species increased from two up to five with the inclusion of *E. cavolini*, *E. labiata*, and *L. sarmentosa* as Mediterranean host species. Among these, it is worth mentioning that, *E. cavolini* and *E. labiata* were never recorded before as *T. nilsodhneri* host species either in the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea.

Consequently, the number of the host species known for *T. nilsodhneri* from the whole range of distribution increased from five up to seven: *E. albicans* (South Africa), *E. cavolini* (Mediterranean Sea), *E. labiata* (Eastern Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea), *E. singularis* (Mediterranean Sea), *E. tricoronata* (South Africa), *E. verrucosa* (Eastern Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea) and *L. sarmentosa* (Eastern Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea). This new knowledge on diet preferences of *T. nilsodhneri* species puts in doubt the concept of strict host specificity believed until now (WILLAN & MORTON, 1984; WILLAN, 1988) for Tritoniidae species, suggesting the necessity to re-evaluate the host preferences shown by other 'tritoniid' species.

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Tritonia nilsodhneri Marcus Ev., 1983 (Gastropoda, Heterobranchia, Tritoniidae): prvi nalaz za Jadransko more i novi podaci o ekologiji i distribuciji mediteranske populacije

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SAŽETAK

Morski puž golać, *Tritonia nilsodhneri*, poznat je s različitih lokaliteta istočnog Atlantskog oceana i Sredozemnog mora, a obično se hrani raznim vrstama gorgonija. Podatci o domaćinima za ovu vrstu u Sredozemlju su još uvijek rijetki. Postoji nekoliko zapisa o ovom pužu u istočnom dijelu Sredozemlja. Ovim radom zabilježena je nazočnost vrste *T. nilsodhneri* u Jadranskom moru.

Nadalje, popis vrsta domaćina koji su povezani sa hranjenjem i mriještenjem sredozemne populacije se povećao sa dva na pet. Sredozemni primjerci *T. nilsodheri* su po prvi put zabilježeni tijekom hranjenja i mriješćenja na vrstama *Leptogorgia sarmentosa, Eunicella cavolini* i *E. labiata*. Ove posljednje dvije spomenute vrste Gorgonida su u ovom radu po prvi put zabilježene kao nova vrsta domaćina za *T. nilsodheri.*

Ključne riječi: Tritoniidae, *Tritonia nilsodhneri*, Jadransko more, *Eunicella*, *Leptogorgia*, specifičnost domaćina