

***Salaria fluviatilis*: a Mediterranean, endangered, freshwater blenny**

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The Mediterranean freshwater ichthyofauna includes many interesting but poorly known species, because of little interest for sport fishing and culinary purposes. *Salaria fluviatilis* is the most widespread freshwater blenny of the Mediterranean. This species is found in rivers, brooks and low altitude lakes rich in branches and with stone bottom. Average lifespan is up to 5 years; larvae are planktonic until the size of about 1.5 cm and live in quiet waters. They reach a size of 12 cm on average and males are larger than females, and have a small ridge on the head. *S. fluviatilis* feeds on benthic organisms like small snails and shrimps, on fish and all kinds of insect larvae; it is itself prey of birds (migratory and resident), tortoise (e.g. *Emys orbicularis*) and snakes (e.g. *Natrix spp.*). The population is very fragmented, and few data are available due to the difficulties to catch or to observe this fish; consequently, it is difficult to know its conservation status. It is included in Annex III of the Bern Convention and is considered a locally endangered species, listed by the IUCN Red List. The species is included in the overall plan of action for the conservation of freshwater Italian fishes. In South Italy, the main threat factors are water pollution, habitat destruction (gravel extraction, damming, canalization of rivers, etc.) and introduction of non-native predatory fish species like catfish (*Ameiurus melas*), bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*) and largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), of two allochthonous decapod crustaceans (*Procambarus clarkii* and *Orconectes limosus*) and two Testudines (*Trachemys spp.*). Due to their important ecological and trophic role of connection between benthic invertebrates, migratory birds and reptiles, we started a monitoring scientific program, capture of breeding animals, setting up of dedicated mesocosms and reproduction as well as rearing of juveniles for, local or in larger scale, restocking purpose allowed by the low genetic divergence of the species.

Key words: *Salaria fluviatilis*, benthic community, biodiversity, freshwater blenny

References: ¹Neat FC et al. 2003 Journal Fish Biology 63 (2): 374-387.