FIRST RECORD OF THE INTRODUCED FOULING TUBEWORM *FICOPOMATUS ENIGMATICUS* (FAUVEL, 1923) IN THE EASTERN ADRIATIC SEA, CROATIA

Marijana Ćukrov 1, Marija Despalatović 2, Ante Žuljevic 2 and Neven Ćukrov 3*
1 Rudjer Boskovic Institute - ncukrov@irb.hr
2 Croatian Biospeleological Society
3 Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries

Abstract

Alien species *Ficopomatus enigmaticus* was recorded on two locations along the eastern Adriatic coast, Krka River Estuary and Neretva River Delta. It is probably introduced as ship fouling.

**Keywords:** Adriatic Sea, Brackish Water, Species Introduction, Polychaeta

Introduction

*Ficopomatus enigmaticus* (Fauvel, 1923), previously know as *Mercierella enigmatica* is sedentary suspension-feeding polychaete belonging to family Serpulidae. These polychaete worms build and live in upright white calcareous tubes that have distinctive collar like rings at irregular intervals. It is reproducing successfully on temperatures around 18°C [1, 2]. It is cryptic species probably invaded the Mediterranean Sea as ship fouling during the First World War [3]. The first record in Europe was in the Channel de Caen in the northern France in 1921. In the Adriatic Sea, *F. enigmaticus* was recorded for the first time in the Venice Lagoon, the Northern Adriatic [4]. Today, it builds huge aggregate “reefs” in the Po River Delta [2].

*F. enigmaticus* was recently recorded at two new locations along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, Krka River Estuary and Neretva River Delta (Fig. 1). The investigations of both records were performed by scuba divers. The first location, Krka River, is situated in the karst region and its estuary, with total length of 22 km, was formed during the Holocene transgression. In the lower part of estuary, the Port of Šibenik is located. It is a typical example of a stratified estuary which bottom gradually deepens from 2 m to 42 m.

Fig. 1. Locations of the *F. enigmaticus* appearance

Around the shores of the lower part of the Krka River Estuary *F. enigmaticus* occurs as single tubes or as large dense fouling aggregations mostly on artificial substrates like cement (seawalls) and iron construction (Fig. 2). It exists at depths up to 3 m, but the largest settlements are up to 0.5 m. Hull encrustations are up to 25 cm thick reaching the water surface during the low tide. We have found larger fouling aggregations only at three sites. Also, along the coast we have observed dead fragments of fouling aggregations with domination of *F. enigmaticus* tubes. Probably, that fouling aggregates collapses due to excess weight or mortality during the winter due the exposure to low temperatures for long period, low salinity and flow intensity.

Fig. 2. Photo of *F. enigmaticus* from the Krka River Estuary (July, 2009.)

The second location, Neretva River Delta, covers about 20 000 ha of which 12 000 ha are in Croatia. It is constituted of numerous channels. The Port of Ploče is situated near the river mouth, and it is one of the main Croatian ports. In this area, *F. enigmaticus* occurs as single specimens or in small aggregates regularly in communities with *Balanus* sp. It mostly occurs at depths of 0.7 m. The fishes from genus *Syngnathus* were observed as main predators on fouling tubeworm in this area.

Conclusion

The fact that populations of *F. enigmaticus* appear near the ports suggests that the probable mechanism of introduction was ship fouling. Also, appropriate environmental factors on these locations enable growth of the species.

References