

Age structure and growth of the Mesopotamian Spiny Eel, *Mastacembelus mastacembelus* (Banks & Solander in Russell, 1974) (Mastacembelidae), in southern Iran

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Abstract. The age structure and growth of the Mesopotamian Spiny Eel, *Mastacembelus mastacembelus* (Banks & Solander, 1974), in the Helleh and Dalaky rivers (Boushehr province in southern Iran) were studied in samples caught between February and March 1999. The maximum total lengths were 425 mm in females (n=59) and 432 mm in males (n=61). Age determination based on scale, opercle and vertebra readings shows that the population has 6 age classes. The growth of both sexes was allometric (b=2.54 males; b=2.73 females). The highest growth rate was observed between age 2 and 3 in both sexes, but afterwards it dropped quickly.

Kurzfassung. Zwischen Februar und März 1999 wurden in den Flüssen Helleh und Dalaky (Provinz Boushehr im Südiran) die Altersstruktur einer Population des Mesopotamischen Stachelaals, *Mastacembelus mastacembelus* (Banks & Solander, 1974) sowie das Wachstum untersucht. Die maximale Körperlänge betrug bei Weibchen 425 mm (n=59), bei Männchen 432 mm (n=61). Eine Altersbestimmung anhand von Schuppen-, Operculum- und Rückgratmerkmalen zeigt das Vorhandensein von sechs Altersklassen. Das Wachstum verläuft bei beiden Geschlechtern allometrisch (b=2.54 für ♂; b=2.73 für ♀). In beiden Geschlechtern wurden die höchsten Wachstumsraten in den Altersklassen 2 und 3 festgestellt, aber sie fielen danach rasch ab.

Key words. *Mastacembelus mastacembelus*, age, growth, Iran, Middle East.

Introduction

The Mesopotamian Spiny Eel is a demersal fish species with little economic importance in Iran (ABDOLI 2000). It inhabits both lotic and lentic environments and occurs in western Asia. In Iran it is found throughout the eastern part of the Tigris-Euphrates basins southwards close to the Persian Gulf basin (COAD 1995). Few studies have been carried out on the ecology and biology of the inland freshwater fishes of Iran, particularly fishes that have no commercial value (ABDOLI et al. 2002, ABDOLI & SKANDARI 1999). Compared with other species of *Mastacembelus*, little attention has been paid to the biology of this species but there are some studies on its taxonomy and distribution (COAD 1987, 1996).

The present paper describes the age structure and growth of the Mesopotamian Spiny Eel in two rivers in the south of Iran. We could not find any paper dealing with the age structure and growth of this species in Iran or any other country for comparison.