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SHORT COMMUNICATION**FIRST RECORD OF BONEFISH, *ALBULA VULPES*, FROM MISSISSIPPI COASTAL WATERS****K.J. Cuevas¹, J.S. Franks², and M.V. Buchanan¹**

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INTRODUCTION

Bonefish (*Albula* spp.), Family Albulidae, occur worldwide in coastal waters of tropical and warm temperate seas (Crabtree et al. 1997), and 2 species, *A. vulpes* and *A. nemoptera*, are recognized from the western Atlantic Ocean (Rivas and Warlen 1967). The normal range of *A. vulpes* in the western Atlantic extends from Bermuda to Brazil, including the Bahamas, Cuba, Mexico, Central America and the Antilles (Hildebrand 1963), but in US waters, *A. vulpes* typically occurs off south Florida (Crabtree et al. 1997). In contrast, *A. nemoptera* has been reported from Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Jamaica and Hispaniola (Uyeno et al. 1983).

Published accounts of *A. vulpes* from the northcentral Gulf of Mexico (hereafter GOM) are rare. Ogren and Brusher (1977) collected a single specimen of *A. vulpes* from St. Andrew Bay, Florida but did not report its size. Thompson and Deegan (1982) reported the collection of 3 *A. vulpes* leptocephali (range: 34.8–53.5 mm standard length (SL)) from Louisiana coastal waters, and Boschung (1992) reported a single *A. vulpes* juvenile (37 mm SL) collected from Grand Bay, Alabama. We report the first record of *A. vulpes* from Mississippi.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

On 4 November 1999, a single specimen of *A. vulpes* was caught off the eastern tip of Petit Bois Island (30°12'N, 88°25'W) in Mississippi Sound by an angler using hook-and-line. The specimen was caught during day time from shallow water (0.5 m) over a sandy bottom.

Species identification followed Hildebrand (1963), and SL and total length (TL) were measured to the nearest millimeter (mm). Wet weight was recorded to the nearest 1.0 g. The gonads were removed, preserved in 10% buffered formalin and processed for histological assessment following standard procedures. The stomach contents were also examined. The specimen resides in the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources fish collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The specimen (Figure 1) measured 200 mm SL (241 mm TL), weighed 112 g, had an empty stomach, and histological analysis indicated it was an immature female. Age-length data from south Florida (Crabtree et al. 1996) suggest the specimen was < 1 year old.

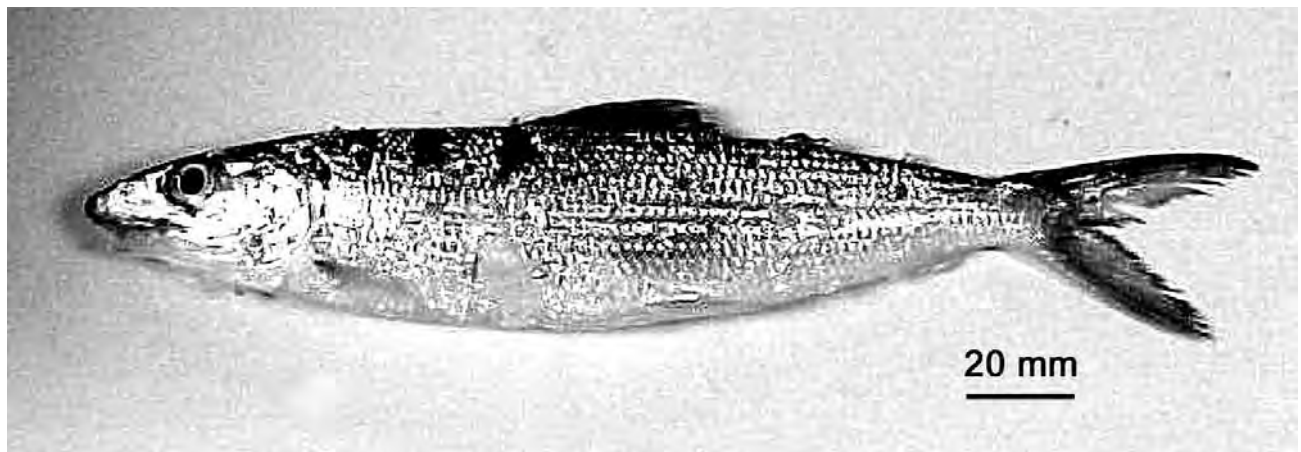


Figure 1. Photograph of a 200 mm SL *Albula vulpes* collected from Mississippi coastal waters.

The fact that a juvenile *A. vulpes* was caught from Mississippi waters, far from its normal range, warrants special interest. Historically, *A. vulpes* has not been encountered during routine fisheries independent monitoring and assessment activities conducted in Mississippi coastal waters from 1967 to 2003 (IJFMAP-M, Gulf Coast Research Laboratory), nor has the species been reported from Mississippi's marine recreational fishery from 1979 to 2003 (MRFSS, <http://www.noaa.gov/ess.fish-habit.html>). The specimen reported here represents the first record of *A. vulpes* from Mississippi and the second record of a juvenile from the northcentral GOM.

Oceanic circulation processes such as Loop Current intrusion into the northern GOM may transport and disperse GOM and Caribbean fauna into the northern GOM (Schroeder 1992, Perry et al. 1998, Johnson and Perry 1999, Johnson et al. 2001). Thompson and Deegan (1982) suggested a Loop Current spin-off eddy to explain the presence of *A. vulpes* leptocephali off Louisiana. Furthermore, larval transport on ocean surface currents was considered the likely mechanism responsible for the unprecedented occurrence of bonefish leptocephali in Long Island Sound, New York (Alperin and Schaefer 1964).

Bonefish have a prolonged November–June spawning season off south Florida (Crabtree et al. 1997) and most likely in the northwestern Caribbean Sea as well. During Spring 1999, satellite imagery (NOAA-AVHRR) of sea surface temperature (SST) revealed the Loop Current as a strong intrusion of warm Caribbean water onto the northern GOM shelf (D. Johnson, pers. comm., GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS), suggesting a possible mechanism for the transport of the specimen, as a leptocephalus larva, into the northern GOM. Furthermore, hydrologic conditions in the southernmost region of eastern Mississippi Sound during spring–fall of 1999 (17.0–30.5 °C, 24.0–34.0 psu) were likely conducive to survival and growth, based on known temperature (Alperin and Schaefer 1964) and salinity (Pfeiler 1981) requirements for young bonefish.

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