

FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE MALTESE ISLANDS

THE KILLIFISH

The Killifish (Maltese: Buzaqq) was chosen as Malta's national fish in 2018. It is also known as the Mediterranean Killifish. As this species of fish has no gastronomic value, it is poorly known by the general public.

Scientific Name: *Aphanius fasciatus* means invisible and striped. The Maltese name Buzaqq is derived from Arabic and means the father of the sack. It is also known as the Mediterranean Toothcarp or the Mediterranean Banded Killifish.

Description: This is the only *Aphanius* species found locally. Males have a pale yellow to yellow-orange tail fin. They also have 8 to 15 dark-blue-to-grey bars on a silvery background, while in some populations, individuals have an additional wide dark band. These bars are usually regularly shaped. Females possess 11 to 17 short dark-brown bars on the sides, running over a faint greyish horizontal stripe. Normally they measure from 50 to 55mm long but large males of 60mm have also been found.

Distribution: This species has a central-eastern distribution across the Mediterranean, including the Adriatic and Aegean Seas, the Middle Eastern shoreline, and North Africa from Egypt to Algeria. It also occurs on the islands of Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily and Malta. In Malta, this species is present in limited and specific areas linked to brackish water (mixture of fresh and sea water) in places like Salina and Ghadira Nature Reserves, il-Magħluq ta' Marsaskala and others. In the recent past, it also occurred at the mouth of the canal at the Marsa Sports Centre.

Status: Scarce, but locally common where it occurs.

Habitat: The Killifish occurs in numerous habitat types, around shallow coastal waters such as lagoons, salt marshes and streams, in areas where submerged vegetation grow thickly. It is highly adaptable and tolerant to different levels of salinity, from pure freshwater to hypersaline conditions. In the Maltese Islands, it occurs in brackish waters.

Conservation: It is a legally protected species at European level, and, by default a protected species in the Maltese Islands. A regeneration project was launched in 2015 to ensure the preservation of this species in Malta. The conservation of its already restricted habitat is fundamental for the preservation of this species..

