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New geographic records of Hamlets, *Hypoplectrus* spp. (Serranidae), in the Caribbean Sea

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Abstract: The exact number of species of hamlets, *Hypoplectrus* spp., in the Caribbean is controversial and the geographic distributions of these species/forms are poorly documented. We report Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles, as a new locality for the Barred Hamlet, *H. puella* (Cuvier), and Shy Hamlet, *H. guttavarius* (Poey); and St. John and St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, for the Tan Hamlet, *Hypoplectrus* sp. The Black Hamlet, *H. nigricans* (Poey), has previously been reported from Curaçao, but we did not see it there. Rev. Biol. Trop. 54 (Suppl. 3): 171-173. Epub 2007 Jan. 15.

Key words: Hamlets, geographic distribution, Curaçao, U.S. Virgin Islands, *Hypoplectrus* spp.

Hamlets (*Hypoplectrus* spp.) are either 10 to 12 species, a single species, or some number in between, of tiny, dull to brightly colored Caribbean coral-reef grouper(s) (Serranidae). They are too small to be of value as human food, too aggressive to be much use as aquarium fishes, and would be pretty much ignored if not for the controversy over the number of species that exist and some of their interesting mimicry (Domeier 1994, Humann 1994, 2002, Aguilar-Perera 2003). Although some species are very popular photographic subjects for sport divers (e.g., Golden Hamlet, *H. gummigutta*) and most species/variants are relatively easy to identify in the field, their distributions remain confused and poorly documented.

On 10 June 2002 using SCUBA, we observed numerous 8-12 cm TL specimens of Tan Hamlet, *Hypoplectrus* sp., an undescribed

species/variant, in 8-16 m depth on an approximately 45° seaward slope of a rock ridge sparsely covered with largely dead, low-profile stony corals off Whistling Key, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, 18°22.1'N, 64°45.3'W. An atypical specimen of Butter Hamlet, *Hypoplectrus unicolor*, also occurred on this reef (Williams and Bunkley-Williams 2005, 2006). The Tan Hamlet had not been previously reported from any of the U.S. Virgin Islands (Domeier 1994, Humann 1994, Aguilar-Perera 2003, in press); although, Humann (2002) reported it from the Virgin Islands in general, with no specific locality, and Fenner (no date) photographed a specimen in St. Thomas, USVI (Fig. 1) below.

After Williams and Bunkley-Williams (2005) was presented in Curaçao, Caroline Rogers (unpubl. data.) informed EHW about a photograph of a Tan Hamlet she had recently

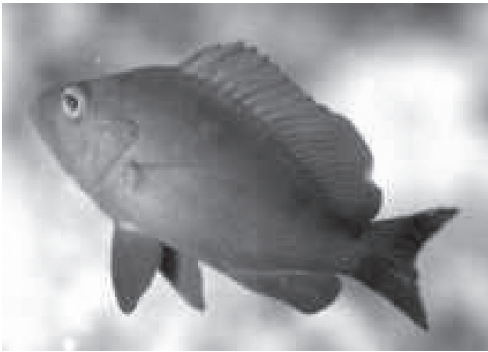


Fig. 1. Tan Hamlet, *Hypoplectrus* sp., photographed by Robert Fenner at St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Fig. 1. Pez vaca, *Hypoplectrus* sp., fotografiado por Robert Fenner en St. Thomas, Islas Vírgenes de los E.U.

taken in Lamershure Bay, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, 18°19.2'N, 64°43.6'W (Fig. 2); and we learned from Robert Fenner (unpubl. data) that he took his photograph in 2001 in Water Bay, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, 18°20.6'N, 64°51.6'W. Thus we establish new geographic records for the Tan Hamlet in St. John and St. Thomas.

During SCUBA dives in Curaçao (Williams and Bunkley-Williams, 2005, 2006), 12 Yellowtail Hamlets, *Hypoplectrus chlorurus* (Cuvier); three Barred Hamlets, *H. puella* (Cuvier); one Shy Hamlet, *H. guttavarius* (Poey); and one hybrid between a Butter



Fig. 2. Tan Hamlet, *Hypoplectrus* sp., photographed by Caroline Rogers in Lamershure Bay, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands (2001).

Fig. 2. Pez vaca, *Hypoplectrus* sp., fotografiado por Caroline Rogers en Lamershure Bay, St. John, Islas Vírgenes de los E.U.

Hamlet and a Barred Hamlet were observed. The Barred Hamlet and Shy Hamlet have not been previously reported from Curaçao. Smith (1997) reported the Black Hamlet, *H. nigricans* (Poey), from Curaçao, but we did not observe that species/variant. Pattengill-Semmens (2002) reported the Tan Hamlet from Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles; however, this was based on the observation of a non-professional.

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RESUMEN

En el Caribe, el número exacto de especies de pez vaca, *Hypoplectrus* spp., es controversial y la distribución geográfica de estas especies/variedades está pobremente documentada. Presentamos Curaçao, Antillas Holandesas, como nueva localidad para el pez vaca de barras, *H. puella* (Cuvier) y el vaca bicolor, *H. guttavarius* (Poey). Agregamos St. John y St. Thomas, Islas Vírgenes de los EUA, al ámbito del "Tan Hamlet", *Hypoplectrus* sp. Anteriormente se dijo que en Curaçao se halla el pez vaca negra, *H. nigricans* (Poey), pero no lo vimos en nuestros muestreos.

Palabras clave: pez vaca, distribución geográfica, Curaçao, Islas Vírgenes, *Hypoplectrus* spp.

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