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SURFACE CAPTURE OF *GYMNACHIRUS MELAS* (PISCES: SOLEIDAE)
FROM OFFSHORE WATERS OF THE EASTERN GULF OF MEXICO—
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ABSTRACT: On 13 January 1976 a mature specimen of the naked sole was captured while night-light sampling in water 39.6 m deep. Only one previous report of a surface capture is known.

A single mature specimen (138 mm total length: 106 mm standard length) of the naked sole, *Gymnachirus melas*, was captured while night-light sampling aboard the R/V HERNAN CORTEZ on 13 January 1976 (ca. 2100 hr). This specimen was taken at the surface with a dipnet as it came into the floodlight field of view. Capture location was 27°22.8'N, 83°22.4'W, 64 km SW of St. Petersburg, Florida; the water depth was 39.6 m. Water temperatures (18.8° C surface, 17.9° C bottom) and salinities (35.96 ppt surface, 35.78 ppt bottom) were recorded on 14 January (ca. 0800 hr).

Geographic range of *G. melas* is from Massachusetts south to Dry Tortugas, Bahamas, eastern Gulf of Mexico (Dawson, 1964), and southwest Caribbean (Palacio, 1974). *Gymnachirus melas* has a known bathymetric range of 1.8 to 182.9 m and has been collected most frequently between 29.3 and 45.7 m (Dawson, 1964). Most captures have been by bottom dredge, indicating that this species remains closely associated with the substrate (Topp and Hoff, 1972). Although vertical migration related to feeding is plausible, stomach analyses indicate a preferred bottom feeding habit (Topp and Hoff, 1972), and the feeding apparatus of soles is adapted for taking strictly benthic prey (Yazdani, 1969).

Woodhead (1966) has expressed the opinion that vertical migration at night does not take most flatfish species far above the sea bed. He indicated that relatively few reports have been made of flatfishes swimming near the surface in deeper waters and that most data concerning vertical movements originated from midwater trawling. Evidence of periodic vertical migration does exist for some soles (e.g., *Solea vulgaris*) and also for some species of *Pleuronectes* (Woodhead, 1966). Beebe and Tee-Van (1928) captured juvenile specimens of *Achirus lineatus* (17.5-25 mm) near surface at night.

Only one previous report of a surface capture of *G. melas* is known (Fahay, 1975). That capture was made on 3 February 1968 at night (ca. 0600 hr) over 15 m of water, 16 km east of Cape Kennedy, Florida; the specimen measured 123 mm (total length?).

In view of the apparently isolated occurrences of surface swimming in flatfishes, this documentation of a surface capture of *G. melas* may be pertinent to present or future studies relevant to the vertical migration of demersal fishes.

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