A WELL ESTABLISHED MPA ALLOWED US TO STUDY THIS RARE SPECIES

Populations of large decapods have diminished due to intense fishing pressure and habitat modification along densely inhabited Western Mediterranean coastlines. Fortunately, populations have increased in well established marine protected areas (MPAs), including that of one of the most sought large decapods, the slipper lobster Scyllarides latus (Latreille, 1803).

A four year monitoring study was conducted to assess seasonal dynamics and habitat preference of S. latus. We did monthly underwater visual census surveys in transects of 5’ duration at depths between 0 and 50 m (N= 1677 transects).

The preferred depth is less than 35 m, with clear preference for caves between 5-20 m. The littoral slope (20 – 35 m) is a transitional habitat.

Density of S. latus shows a marked seasonality. Late spring values are 5 to 15 times above average, matching the reproductive pattern. No lobster were observed during winter surveys.

Reproduction extends from mid spring to mid-summer. High incidence of mating aggregations observed in May. Females reach maturity at 98 mm CL and 6 years. Gonad maturation, mating and egg incubation take place in shallow habitats, while spawning may occur in deeper habitats.

Size distribution indicates that females are larger.