Nota Breve | Short Note

First record of smoothtail mobula *Mobula thurstoni* (Myliobatidae) in Cabo Verde

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Mobulinae rays are part of Cabo Verde native biodiversity and belong to two extant genera, *Manta* and *Mobula* (Paig-Tran *et al.* 2013, Ward-Paige *et al.* 2013). *Mobula* spp. can be distinguished from *Manta* spp. by the mouth position, the shape of the cephalic fins and body size (Stevens 2011). Despite their large size, little is known about their population trends and precise distribution. They are particularly difficult to study in the wild and have restricted distributions (Ward-Paige *et al.* 2013, Croll *et al.* 2015). Two species of *Manta* and one of *Mobula* have been confirmed in Cabo Verde: the giant manta ray *Manta birostris*, the reef manta ray *Manta alfredi*, and the Chilean devil ray *Mobula tarapacana* (Reiner 2005, Marshall 2009, D’Oliveira 2010, Wirtz *et al.* 2013). Other Myliobatis such as the spotted eagle ray *Aetobatus narinari* have been recently pointed to Cabo Verde (Debelius 1997) and to Canary and Madeira Islands (Froese & Pauly 2016). However, it is likely that other species are present in these waters, given the similarity among species and the lack of studies, two main factors contributing for challenging species identification (Duffy & Abbott 2003).

The first record of *Mobula thurstoni* Lloyd, 1908 (Fig 1) in Cabo Verde occurred on 31st July 2015 in Praionha beach, 1.7 km from Praia Gonçalo, Maio Island (Fig. 2). It was found by Denis Dias, a FMB member before an in-water survey.
**Fig 1.** *Mobula thurstoni* caught in Praiona, on 31st July 2015. A) Ventral and B) dorsal views, C) mouth position, D) white-tipped dorsal fin and E) immature male claspers views.

**Fig 2.** Maio Island map, Cabo Verde, showing the location where the *Mobula thurstoni* specimen was found (X) on 31st July 2015.
According to local fishermen, the specimen was a bycatch of a gill net laid during the previous night. It was a newborn male (Fig. 1 C, D & F) as its disc width (DW) measured only 80 cm (Last & Stevens 1994). The animal was identified as *Mobula* as opposed to *Manta* due to its ventral mouth, and as *Mobula thurstoni* (Fig. 1A & B) as opposed to other *Mobula* species because of its short cephalic fins (length from the tip of one fin to the corner of the mouth lower than 16% of DW), the lack of spine at the base of the tail, the white-tipped dorsal fin, the long thin tail with a dorso-ventrally compressed base, and a double curvature at the pectoral fins’ anterior margin (Stevens 2011). Previous sightings of *Mobula thurstoni* could not be confirmed during surveys due to the long distance to animals and low quality of photographs (FMB pers. comm.). Validation of species identification through molecular analysis is needed to corroborate morphological identification. Given that *Mobula thurstoni* is listed as Near Threatened (Walls et al. 2016), and vulnerable to bycatch in driftnets and longlines, further studies are important to identify main habitats and to access its conservation status at a national level.

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REFERENCES


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