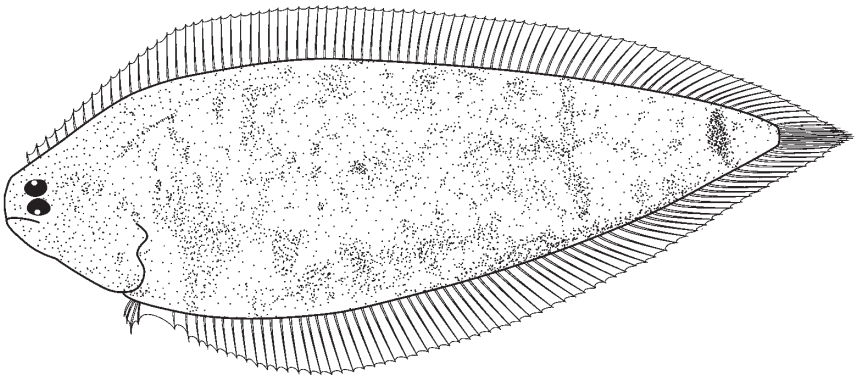
Symphurus parvus Ginsburg, 1951

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Symphurus minor* Ginsburg, 1951.

FAO names: En - Pygmy tonguefish.

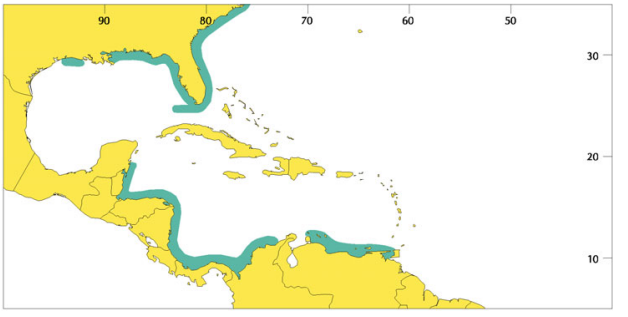


Diagnostic characters: Body moderately deep; maximum depth in anterior 1/3 of body; body tapering fairly rapidly in posteriorly. Head relatively long and wide; head length slightly less than head width. Snout short, pointed. **Lower eye large**; eyes usually equal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes partially covered with 4 to 8 small ctenoid scales. **Pupillary operculum well developed**. Maxilla usually extending posteriorly to point between verticals through anterior margin and midpoint of lower eye. **Ocular-side lower jaw without fleshy ridge. Margin of ocular-side premaxilla with teeth extending over anterior 1/2 to three-fourths (rarely along entire jaw margin); ocular-side dentary with teeth extending over entire margin of bone; less frequently, teeth along only anterior three-fourths of dentary margin. Dorsal-fin rays 75 to 86. Anal-fin rays 60 to 70. Scales absent on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays. Basal regions of dorsal-fin membrane from about seventh dorsal-fin ray and backwards, and anal-fin membrane throughout entire length of fin with a series of openings (membrane ostia) between fin rays. Caudal-fin rays 10. Longitudinal scale rows 59 to 78. ID pattern 1-5-2 or 1-4-2. Total vertebrae 43 to 47, usually 44 to 46. Colour: ocular surface light brown or yellowish with conspicuous, prominent, dark brown, roughly oblong- or diamond-shaped blotch immediately anterior to caudal-fin base**, and variable number and arrangement of irregular dusky markings; occasional specimens with traces of faint, darker brown, incomplete crossbands. **Blind side whitish or yellowish, without pepper-dots. Peritoneum unpigmented. Dorsal and anal fins without conspicuous spots or blotches**. Caudal fin usually darker than dorsal or anal fins. Scaly proximal portion of caudal fin with small, darker area sometimes forming diffuse spot. Membrane and finrays of caudal fin on blind side with pepper-dots, especially well developed at base of fin.

Size: Maximum about 88 mm standard length, commonly 40 to 70 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Occurs on mud bottoms on the inner continental shelf at depths of 20 to 146 m, with 1 unusual deep-water capture of a single specimen at 383 m. Centre of abundance occurs between 30 and 110 m. Collected on west Florida shelf at 18.8 to 24 °C and salinities of 33.8 to 36.3‰. Males and females attain similar sizes. Females mature at 40 to 45 mm standard length. Most collections consist of solitary individuals. Of no commercial interest.

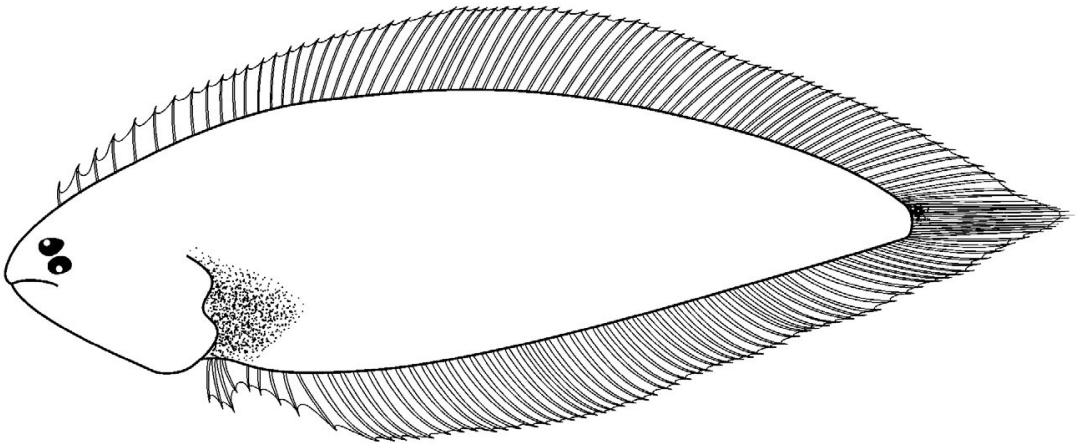
Distribution: Western North Atlantic from just south of Cape Lookout, North Carolina, to Trinidad. Most frequently taken off the southeastern Atlantic coast of Florida, throughout the Gulf of Mexico, including areas off west Florida, the Central Gulf off Alabama and Louisiana, and the western Gulf off Texas and the Yucatán Peninsula, and throughout the Caribbean Sea including areas to off Belize, eastern Venezuela, and Trinidad. Absent from the Greater and Lesser Antilles.



Symphurus pelicanus Ginsburg, 1951

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

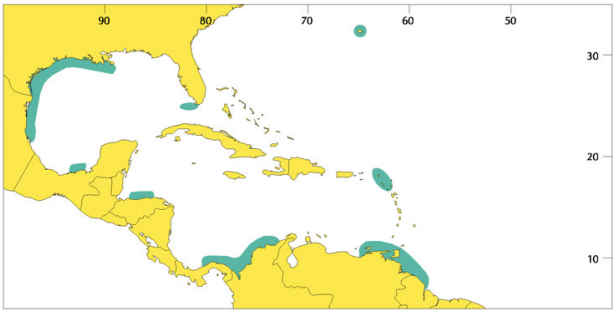
FAO names: En - Longtail tonguefish.



Diagnostic characters: Body slender; maximum depth near midpoint; with gradual posterior taper. Head long and moderately wide; head length usually equal or slightly smaller than, head width. Lower eye relatively large; eyes usually equal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes with 3 or 4 rows of small ctenoid scales. **Pupillary operculum absent**. Snout long and pointed. Maxilla extending posteriorly to vertical through midpoint of lower eye. Ocular-side lower jaw without fleshy ridge. **Teeth on ocular-side jaws very small. Lower jaw with teeth along nearly entire length of dentary; ocular-side premaxilla with teeth usually along margin of anterior three-fourths of jaw, occasionally with row of slender teeth along complete margin of premaxilla. Dorsal-fin rays 77 to 85. Dorsal-fin origin usually posterior to vertical through midpoint of upper eye. Anal-fin rays 64 to 70**. Scales absent on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays. **Caudal-fin rays 12. Longitudinal scale rows 62 to 70** (most specimens missing scales). ID pattern usually 1-3-2. **Total vertebrae 43 to 46, usually 45 or 46. Colour: ocular surface uniformly light brown to yellowish and without prominent crossbands or caudal blotch**. Crossbands, when present, faintly pigmented and barely perceptible. **Blind side off-white and thickly sprinkled with very small pepper-dots over entire surface from about angle of jaws to caudal region in heavily pigmented individuals; speckling of pepper-dots usually heaviest on regions of blind side overlying dorsal- and anal-fin pterygiophores. Peritoneum black. Dorsal, anal, and caudal fins not pigmented differently from general body coloration**. Caudal fin usually yellowish or hyaline over entire length, occasionally with irregular, poorly-defined spot at caudal-fin base.

Size: Maximum about 70 mm standard length, commonly 31 to 60 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Occurs primarily on silt and soft mud bottoms in moderate depths (24 to 133 m) on the inner continental shelf, with centre of abundance between 31 and 70 m. Uncommonly occurring deeper than 80 m. Unknown from areas in the eastern and far southwestern Gulf of Mexico, the Antilles, or Caribbean locations with narrow continental shelves, or extensive reef development and live-bottom habitats. Males and females attain similar sizes. Females mature at 37 to 40 mm standard length. Little is known of the ecology of this diminutive flatfish. No commercial interest to fisheries.

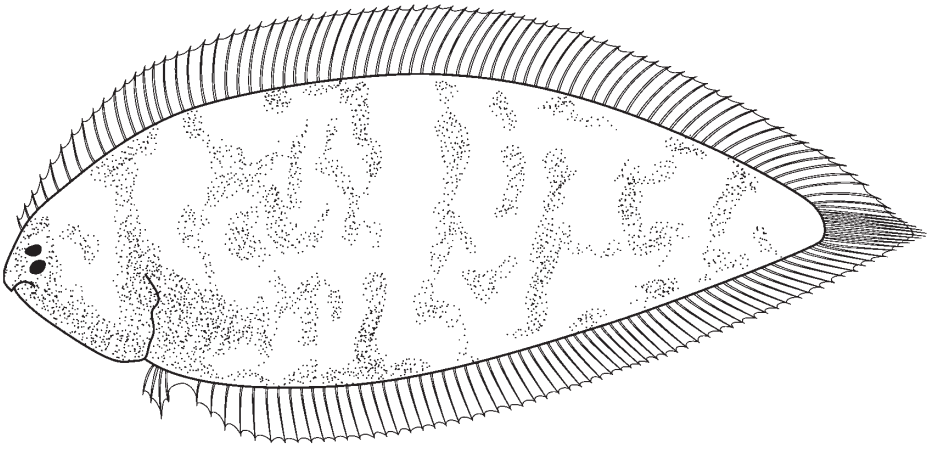


Distribution: Continental shelf from Straits of Florida, eastern Gulf of Mexico (based on a single capture), but most common on the inner continental shelf west and south of the Mississippi Delta to Guyana. There is also an unusual capture, perhaps an expatriated individual, of an adult taken on the surface in the Sargasso Sea (29°55'N, 70°20'W).

Symphurus piger (Goode and Bean, 1886)

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

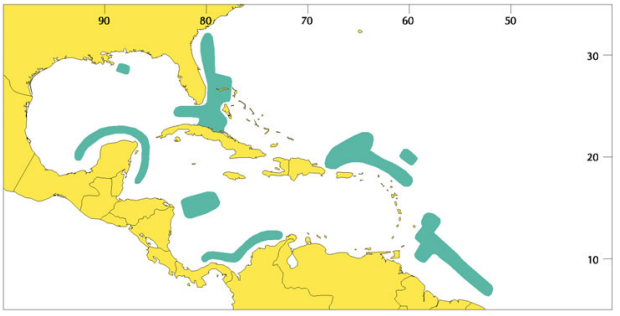
FAO names: En - Deepwater tonguefish.



Diagnostic characters: Body relatively deep; maximum depth in anterior 1/3 of body; tapering relatively rapidly posterior to midpoint. Head long and wide; **head much shorter than wide**. Lower eye relatively small; eyes usually equal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes usually covered with 4 or 5 short rows of small ctenoid scales. **Pupillary operculum absent**. Snout short, rounded. Ocular-side lower jaw without fleshy ridge. **Teeth along entire margin of ocular-side dentary. Anterior three-fourths of margin of ocular-side premaxilla usually with teeth; occasionally teeth over entire marginal surface of premaxilla. Dorsal-fin rays 80 to 90. Anal-fin rays 68 to 74**. Scales absent on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays. **Caudal-fin rays usually 12. Longitudinal scale rows 62 to 75. ID pattern usually 1-3-2. Total vertebrae 45 to 49, usually 47 to 49. Hypurals 5. Colour: ocular surface dark brown with 3 to 10 (usually 5 to 8) well-developed, darker brown, sharply-contrasting, rather narrow crossbands on head and body; without caudal blotch**. Crossbands continued onto dorsal and anal fins as small, elongate or irregularly-shaped, diffuse blotches. Occasionally, crossbands scarcely evident against exceptionally dark background coloration. Ocular surface of individuals collected on light-coloured substrates yellowish, with faint, almost imperceptible crossbands. **Blind side uniformly yellowish-white; without pepper-dots. Peritoneum black. Dorsal and anal fins without definite spots or blotches**. Caudal-fin uniformly dark, **without pigmented spot at caudal-fin base.**

Size: Maximum about 130 mm standard length, commonly 80 to 105 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology and fisheries: Occurs on relatively soft mud bottoms on the outer continental shelf and upper continental slope at 92 to 549 m, with a centre of abundance between 141 and 300 m. Small juveniles occur at depths inhabited by adults. Rarely collected at depths shallower than 110 m or deeper than 300 m. Males and females attain similar sizes. Females mature at ca. 70 mm standard length. Little is known about the ecology of this species. Of no commercial interest.

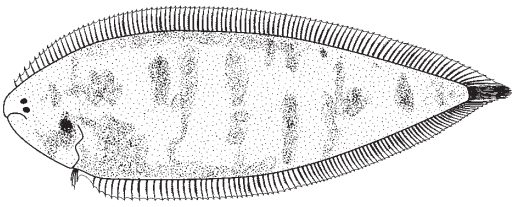


Distribution: Primarily a tropical species widespread in relatively deep-water areas from southern Florida (ca. 30°N), the Florida Straits and Bahamas, infrequently in the Gulf of Mexico, and south through the Caribbean Sea, including waters off the Greater and Lesser Antilles, as well as off Mexico (Yucatán Peninsula), Central America, and northern South America to about French Guiana (7°N, 53°W).

Symphurus plagiusa (Linnaeus, 1766) YFP

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Symphurus civitatium* (Ginsburg, 1951).

FAO names: En - Blackcheek tonguefish; **Fr** - Langue joue noire; **Sp** - Lengua caranegra.

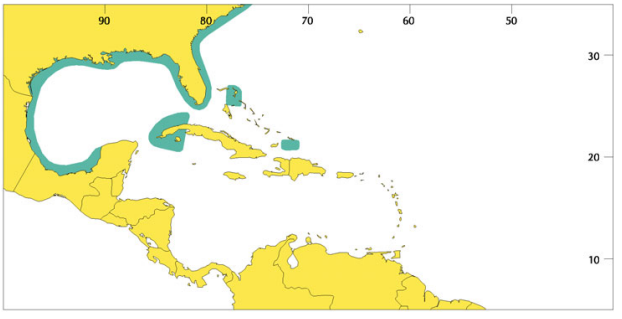


Diagnostic characters: Body moderately deep; maximum depth in anterior 1/3 of body; tapering gradually posterior to midpoint. Head moderately long and wide; head length shorter than head width. Snout short and rounded. **Lower eye small**; eyes usually equal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes not covered with scales. **Pupillary operculum absent** (occasional specimens with upper side of iris with irregular margin that may be remnant of small, poorly-developed, pupillary operculum). **Ocular-side lower jaw with fleshy ridge near posterior margin. Ocular-side premaxilla usually lacking teeth altogether. Dorsal-fin rays 81 to 91. Anal-fin rays 66 to 75. Blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays (especially in posterior region of fins and in larger specimens) with single row of small, well-developed ctenoid scales extending from base to point about three-fourths length of fin ray. Larger specimens also with row of small, well-developed ctenoid scales extending from base to about three-fourths length of fin rays on ocular side of body. Caudal-fin rays usually 10. Longitudinal scale rows 76 to 86. ID pattern usually 1-4-3. Total vertebrae 44 to 49, usually 45 to 48. Colour:** ocular surface uniformly dull tannish to dark brown with or without crossbands, or light to dark brown with sharply contrasting dark brown crossbands. Individuals from habitats with light-coloured substrates generally with whitish ocular surface, with or without crossbands. Crossbands highly variable in number (usually 4 or 5 in adults) and degree of development, but not continued onto dorsal and anal fins. **Majority of larger specimens with large, conspicuous black spot on upper lobe of ocular-side opercle (usually faint or absent in smaller specimens). Inner linings of opercles and isthmus on both sides of body heavily pigmented. Gill filaments with conspicuous median line of dark pigment. Blind side uniformly creamy white, without pepper-dots. Peritoneum unpigmented. Dorsal and anal fins faintly or moderately dusky, without conspicuous spots or blotches. Caudal fin dusky, without spots or blotches.**

Size: Maximum about 210 mm standard length, commonly 120 to 160 mm standard length.

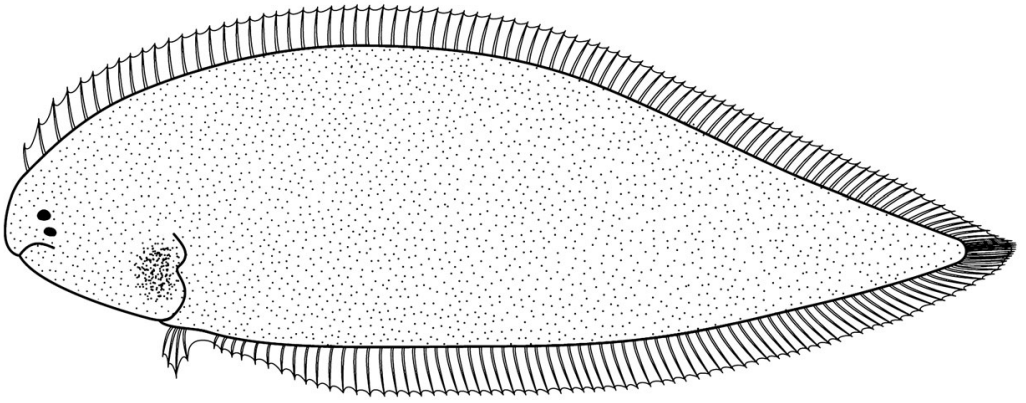
Habitat, biology, and fisheries: The most common tonguefish occurring on soft bottom sediments and a year-round resident in nearshore marine and estuarine waters from Chesapeake Bay and south through its range to the southern Gulf of Mexico. Inhabits nearshore coastal and estuarine waters at depths from less than 1 to 183 m, with a centre of abundance between 1 and 30 m. Rarely collected deeper than about 40 m. All life history stages occur in nearshore and estuarine habitats, but the smallest juveniles occur in extremely shallow tidal creeks in estuarine saltmarshes. Larger individuals (usually more than 100 mm) occur regularly in 10 to 30 m on the inner continental shelf. Recorded at salinities of 0.0 to 42.9‰; but apparently does not tolerate salinity much above 35‰. A non-discriminate, benthic omnivore consuming a variety of benthic prey and lesser amounts of plant detritus. Males and females reach similar sizes. Adults may undertake a seaward spawning migration. Spawning occurs in large estuaries and coastal waters. Off the south Atlantic states and in the Gulf of Mexico, this species contributes a small percentage to industrial fisheries, but regarded as a nuisance because it clogs fishing nets and interferes with efficiency of gear. Separate statistics not reported. Caught mainly with bottom trawls, but not marketed in large quantities. Larger tonguefish also reported in the shrimp bycatch.

Distribution: Western North Atlantic from Long Island Sound (sporadic captures) to the Florida Keys, and through the northern Gulf of Mexico to Campeche Peninsula, Mexico; also the Bahamas (uncommon), and Cuba. The geographic centre of abundance for this species occurs in estuarine and nearshore habitats from Chesapeake Bay to southern Florida, including Florida Bay, and throughout the northern Gulf of Mexico. Records from Puerto Rico appear to be misidentifications.



Symphurus plagusia (Bloch and Schneider, 1801) YFS

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Symphurus tessellatus* (Quoy and Gaimard, 1824).
FAO names: En - Duskycheek tonguefish; **Fr** - Langue joue cendre; **Sp** - Lengua ceniza.

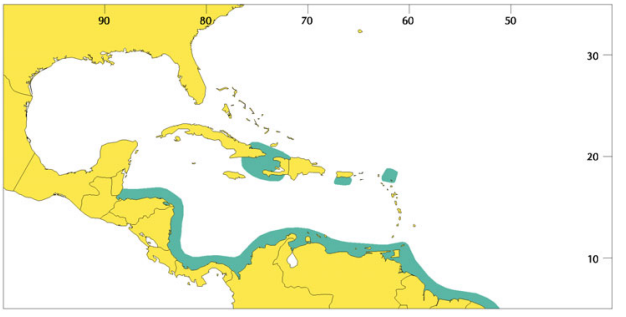


Diagnostic characters: Body relatively deep; greatest depth in anterior 1/3 of body; tapering fairly gradually posterior to midpoint. Head wide; head length usually much shorter than head width. **Snout moderately long, somewhat square. Lower eye small, spherical** (64 to 95 thousandths of head length, = 82); eyes slightly subequal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes not covered with scales. **Pupillary operculum absent. Maxilla usually reaching posteriorly to point between verticals through posterior margin of lower eye pupil to vertical just slightly posterior to posterior margin of lower eye. Ocular-side lower jaw with distinct, fleshy ridge near posterior margin. Dorsal-fin rays 89 to 97. Dorsal-fin origin far forward, usually at vertical through anterior margin of upper eye**, or with first and sometimes second dorsal-fin rays inserting anterior to vertical through anterior margin of upper eye. **Anal-fin rays 73 to 81. Scales absent on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays. Caudal-fin rays usually 12. Longitudinal scale rows 79 to 89. ID pattern usually 1-4-3. Total vertebrae 47 to 51, usually 49 to 51. Colour: ocular surface usually uniformly light brown or yellowish, occasionally with 8 to 14, narrow, faint crossbands**. Crossbands not continued onto dorsal and anal fins. **Blind side creamy white, without pepper-dots. Peritoneum unpigmented. Pigmentation of outer surface of ocular-side opercle usually same as that of body; occasionally with dusky blotch on upper opercular lobe due to pigment on inner lining of ocular-side opercle showing through to outer surface. Dorsal and anal fins uniformly dusky throughout their lengths, without conspicuous spots or blotches**; sometimes with alternating series of darker-pigmented rays (usually 2 or 3 in succession) separated by about 4 or 5 successive lighter-pigmented rays. Basal half (scale-covered) of caudal fin dark brown; distal half of caudal-fin rays streaked with dark pigment.

Size: Maximum about 130 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: A shallow-water species (1 to 51 m) most commonly inhabiting mud bottoms in estuaries and coastal waters to about 10 m. All life-history stages occur in shallow areas and only occasional individuals taken deeper (30 to 51 m). Males and females attain similar sizes. Females mature at sizes larger than 80 mm standard length. Little is known concerning its ecology. Of no commercial importance.

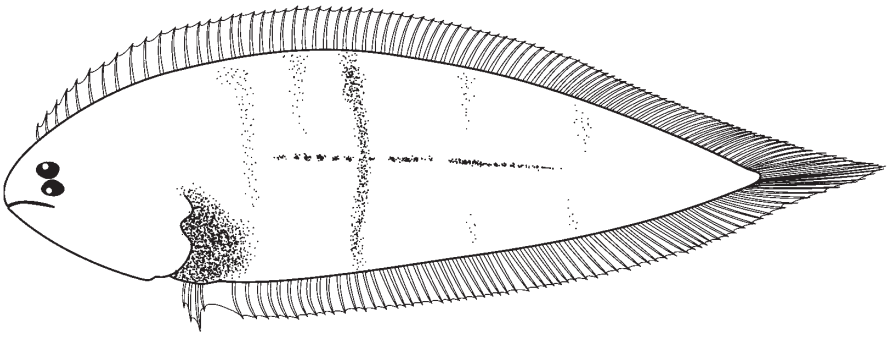
Distribution: Widely distributed in shallow waters of the tropical western Atlantic, including Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Hispaniola, and along Central America at Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, and South America at Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, Tobago, and Brazil as far south as Rio de Janeiro. Unknown from the Bahamas.



Symphurus pusillus (Goode and Bean, 1885)

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

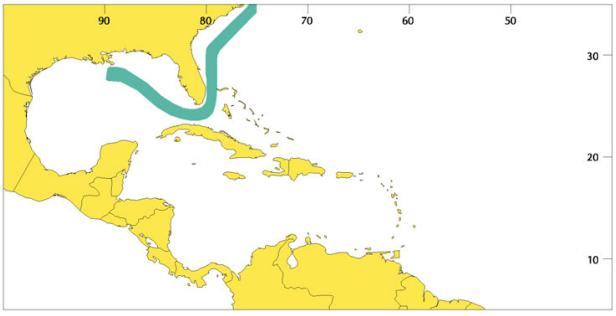
FAO names: En - Northern tonguefish.



Diagnostic characters: Body moderately deep; maximum depth in anterior 1/3 of body; tapering moderately posterior to midpoint. Head nearly as long as wide. Snout somewhat pointed. Lower eye moderately large; eyes usually equal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes partially covered with 3 or 4 rows of small scales. **Pupillary operculum absent**. Maxilla extending posteriorly to point between verticals through anterior margin of pupil and midpoint of lower eye. Ocular-side lower jaw without fleshy ridge. **Teeth on ocular-side lower jaw in single row over full length of margin of dentary. Teeth usually present only on anterior three-fourths of margin of ocular-side premaxilla; occasionally teeth along full length of premaxilla. Dorsal-fin rays 83 to 88**. Dorsal-fin origin at point between verticals through midpoint and anterior margin of upper eye. **Anal-fin rays 71 to 75**. Scales absent on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays. **Caudal-fin rays 12. Longitudinal scale rows 77 to 87. ID pattern usually 1-3-2. Total vertebrae 47 to 49 usually 48 or 49. Colour: ocular surface yellowish, with 2 to 6 (usually only 3 or 4 obvious) light brown crossbands** more or less continuous across body; **without caudal blotch**. Head region dorsad and anteriad to eyes with dermal melanophores arranged in obvious V-shape pattern extending from body margin to about level of upper eye. Specimens lacking scales with single series of dark melanophores deep within dermis, showing through skin at bases of anteriormost 10 to 20 dorsal-fin rays. **Blind side uniformly off-white or yellowish, without pepper-dots**. Specimens lacking scales with median series of prominent, dark melanophores in dermis along anterior 2/3 of axis of vertebral column, visible through skin on both sides of body. **Peritoneum black**. Dorsal and anal fins with diffuse brown pigment on basal half of fin rays, most apparent in caudal region of body. Specimens with well-developed body crossbands usually with small, lightly-pigmented blotches on dorsal and anal fins corresponding to crossbands. Occasionally with small, dark, almost spherical spot on scaly portion of caudal-fin base; distal portion of caudal fin usually unpigmented or yellowish.

Size: Maximum about 77 mm standard length, commonly 38 to 55 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Inhabiting mud bottoms in moderate depths (102 to 233 m) on the continental shelf. This species has been irregularly collected and is poorly known. Most samples consist of solitary individuals. Females mature at ca. 40 mm standard length and are slightly larger than males. Little is known about the ecology of this species. Of no commercial interest.

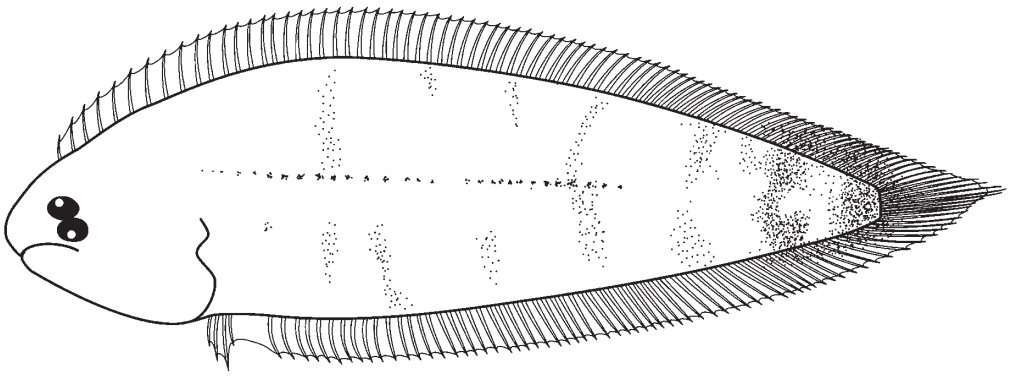


Distribution: Western North Atlantic off Long Island, New York, southward to Florida, and extending into the eastern Gulf of Mexico westward to the region of DeSoto Submarine Canyon. Most specimens collected on the continental shelf between Cape Hatteras and southern Florida.

Symphurus rhytisma Böhlke, 1961

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

FAO names: En- Patchtail tonguefish.

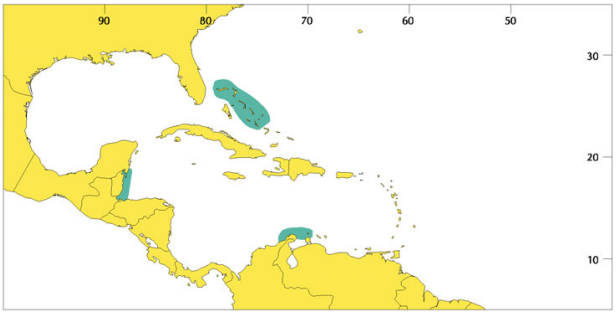


Diagnostic characters: Body moderately deep; maximum depth in anterior 1/3 of body; tapering fairly moderately posterior to anus. Head long and narrow; head length slightly shorter than head width. Snout moderately long and pointed. Lower eye relatively large. Eyes equal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes usually not covered with scales. **Pupillary operculum absent**. Maxilla extending posteriorly to point between verticals through anterior margin of pupil and midpoint of lower eye. Ocular-side lower jaw without fleshy ridge. **Teeth well developed on all jaws. Dorsal-fin rays 83 to 87**. Dorsal-fin origin usually equal with vertical through midpoint of upper eye. **Anal-fin rays 68 to 71**. Scales absent on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays. **Caudal-fin rays 12. Longitudinal scale rows 91 to 97. ID pattern 1-3-2. Total vertebrae 46 to 48, usually 47. Colour: ocular surface pallid**, usually with traces of 2 to 8 (usually 8) incomplete, narrow, brown crossbands on head and body. **Some individuals with conspicuous dark blotch on caudal region of body** (better developed in smaller individuals). **Blind side uniformly pale, off-white, without pepper-dots**. Occasionally with single median line of black dermal spots showing through skin along axis of vertebral column on blind side. **Peritoneum unpigmented**. Dorsal and anal fins unpigmented anteriorly, fins in midregion of body with pigmented blotches (extensions of body crossbands onto fins); **a diffuse dark blotch on posteriormost dorsal and anal fins. Proximal 1/3 of caudal fin usually darkly pigmented; posterior 2/3 of fin unpigmented.**

Size: Maximum about 45 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Infrequently collected usually on sandy substrates adjacent to coral reefs at 3 to 25 m. Two specimens taken off Brazil by trawling at 37 and 97 m. Males and females similar in size. Females mature around 35 mm standard length. Of no commercial importance.

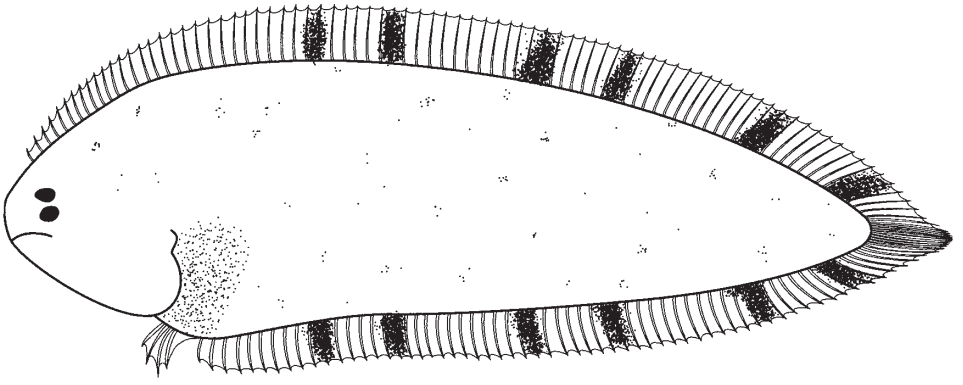
Distribution: Caribbean including Bahamas, Glovers Reef, Belize, and Curaçao and off Espirito Santo, Brazil (20 to 21°S).



Symphurus stigmosus Munroe, 1998

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Symphurus billykrietei* Munroe, 1998.

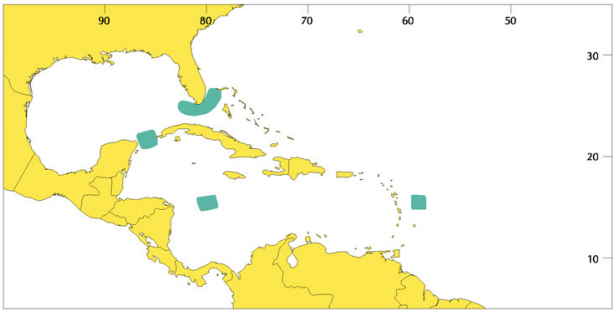
FAO names: En - Blotchfin tonguefish.



Diagnostic characters: Body relatively deep; maximum depth in anterior 1/3 of body; tapering rapidly posterior to midpoint. Head short and relatively wide; head length shorter than head width; **eyeballs usually contiguous at least at midpoint and usually without measurable space between eyeballs**. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes partially covered with 3 to 5 rows of small ctenoid scales. **Pupillary operculum absent** (but iris often with minute marginal indentation projecting onto pupil at upper midpoint). Snout short and rounded. Ocular-side lower jaw without pronounced fleshy ridge.**Ocular-side premaxilla with single row of slender teeth along margin, or occasionally only with teeth on anterior three-fourths of bone. Dorsal-fin rays 92 to 95**. Dorsal-fin origin usually reaching point between verticals through anterior margin of upper eye and anterior margin of pupil of upper eye. **Anal-fin rays 78 to 81**. Scales absent on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays. **Caudal-fin rays 12**, rarely 11. Longitudinal scales 98 to 100. **ID pattern 1-3-2. Total vertebrae 51 or 52. Colour: ocular surface usually uniformly yellowish to yellowish-brown, without prominent crossbands or pigmented blotches on head and body**, occasionally with diffuse mottling of small brown melanophores scattered over body surface, or with scales on head and anterior body edged in white. **Blind side uniformly yellowish, without pepper-dots**. Faded specimens without scales with median series of conspicuous dark black dermal melanophores along axis of vertebral column on both sides of body; especially prominent in anterior 2/3 of body. **Peritoneum usually dark black**. Dorsal and anal fins lightly pigmented anteriorly; with **darkly pigmented basal longitudinal stripe and 4 to 6 conspicuous dark brown or black blotches on posterior 2/3 of fins**. Stripe not intensifying in caudal region or continuing onto caudal fin. **Caudal fin uniformly hyaline, without pigmented spot on scaly, basal portion.**

Size: Maximum about 127 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Known from 12 specimens collected at 192 to 373 m on sediments underlying strong surface currents, such as those in the Yucatán Channel and beneath the Florida Current. No information regarding sediment composition at collection sites. Females larger than 85 mm standard length are mature. Little else known regarding the ecology. Of no commercial interest to fisheries.

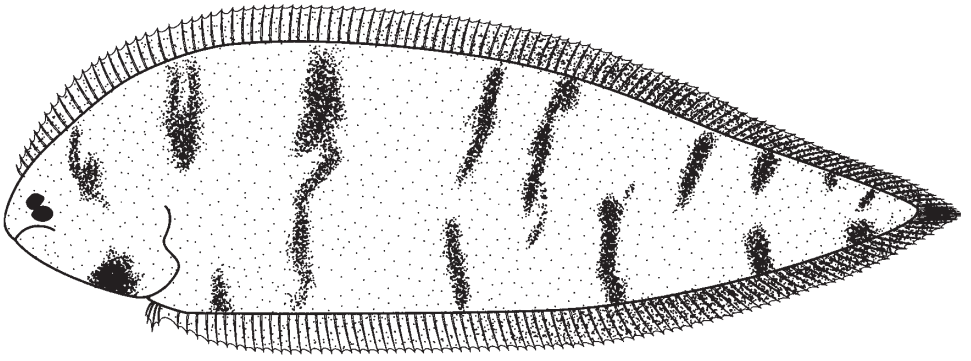


Distribution: Tropical Atlantic in regions beneath the Gulf Stream and in Straits of Florida between southern Florida and the Bahamas; the Straits of Florida off the Tortugas region; Caribbean Sea off Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico; near Serrana Bank, Colombia, and off Dominica.

Symphurus tessellatus (Quoy and Gaimard, 1824) YFJ

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Symphurus oculellus* (Munroe, 1998).

FAO names: En - Tessellated tonguefish.

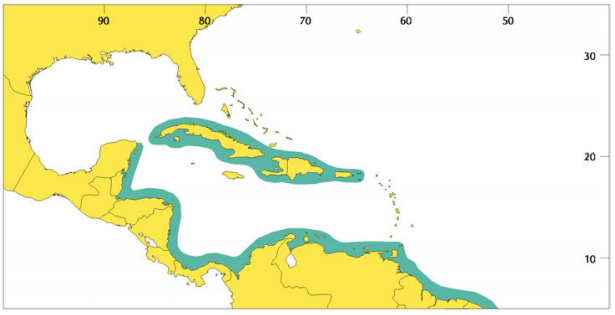


Diagnostic characters: Body relatively elongate; greatest depth in anterior 1/3 of body; tapering fairly gradually posterior to midpoint. Head wide; head length shorter than head width. **Snout long and somewhat pointed. Lower eye moderately large** (79 to 114 thousandths of head length, = 95); eyes slightly subequal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes not covered with scales. **Pupillary operculum absent. Maxilla usually reaching posteriorly to point between verticals through middle and posterior margin of pupil of lower eye. Ocular-side lower jaw lacking fleshy ridge. Dorsal-fin rays 91 to 102. Anal-fin rays 74 to 86**. Four to eight scales present on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays (best-developed on fin rays in posterior 1/3 of fin of specimens larger than 70 mm). **Caudal-fin rays usually 12. Longitudinal scale rows 81 to 96. ID pattern usually 1-4-3. Total vertebrae 48 to 54, usually 50 to 53. Colour: ocular-surface ranging from dark to light brown, usually with 5 to 9 well-developed, sharply contrasting, relatively wide, dark brown crossbands on head and trunk. Blind side usually uniformly creamy white, without pepper-dots**; some mature males with irregular patches of black pigment on caudal 1/3 of blind side. **Peritoneum unpigmented. Outer surface of ocular-side opercle usually with distinct dark brown or black spot on ventral margin. Inner linings of opercles and isthmus on both sides of body heavily pigmented. Fin rays and membranes of dorsal and anal fins on posterior 2/3 of body becoming increasingly darker posteriorly, without series of pigmented blotches or spots**. Males with posteriormost regions of fins almost uniformly black; females with posterior portions of fins, although darker than anterior regions, usually dark brown and not as intensively pigmented as in mature males. **Caudal fin uniformly dark brown or black.**

Size: Maximum about 220 mm standard length, common to 190 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Juveniles and adults inhabit soft silt and muddy sand sediments; but not live bottom habitats. Juveniles occur commonly in medium to high salinity regions of estuaries and in high salinity habitats in nearshore mudflats. Adults generally occur to about 86 m, with most taken between 1 to 50 m; rarely deeper than 70 m. Females are somewhat larger than males, and mature at 104 to 120 mm standard length, but usually larger than 115 mm. One of the most abundant and frequently collected tonguefishes, especially in trawls, from Belize and Honduras south to Venezuela and along the entire coastline of northern South America from the Guianas to northern Brazil. Not marketed in large quantities; of minor importance in industrial fisheries. Separate statistics not reported. Caught mainly with bottom trawls; contributes to bycatch in shrimp trawl fisheries.

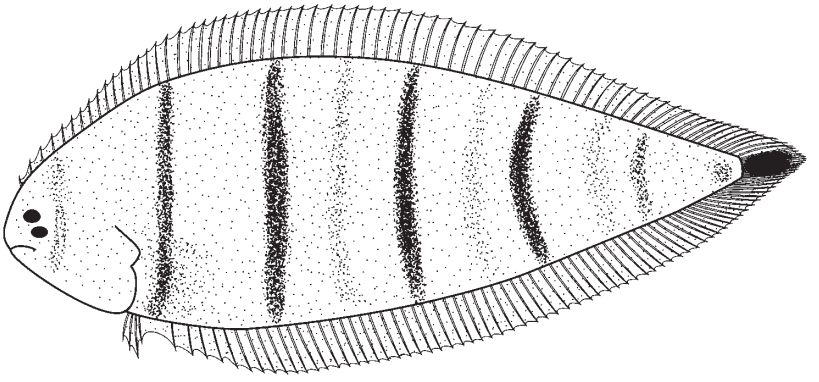
Distribution: Widespread, common species, ranging from the larger Caribbean Islands (Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hispaniola, and Haiti, and common on the shelf area southwest of Jamaica), south to Uruguay. Frequently captured on muddy bottoms from Belize (17°12'N) south to Uruguay (ca. 37°S). Absent from regions with live-bottom substrates or upwelling areas.



Symphurus urospilus Ginsburg, 1951

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

FAO names: En - Spottail tonguefish.

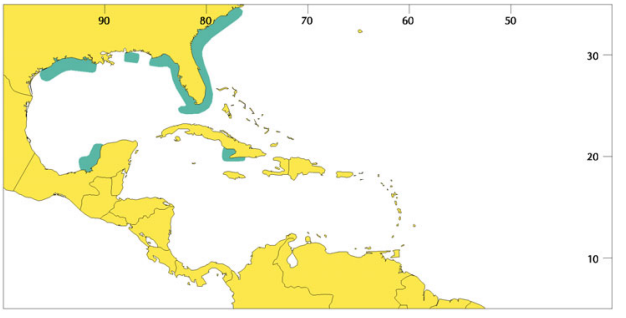


Diagnostic characters: Body very deep; maximum depth in anterior 1/3 of body; tapering fairly rapidly in posterior 2/3 of body. **Head moderately long and very wide**; head length much shorter than head width. Snout short and rounded. Lower eye relatively large; eyes usually equal in position. Anterior and medial surfaces of eyes without scales. **Pupillary operculum well developed. Ocular-side lower jaw with distinct, fleshy ridge near posterior margin. Ocular-side upper jaw usually lacking teeth. Dorsal-fin rays 82 to 90. Anal-fin rays 64 to 74. Scales usually absent on blind sides of dorsal- and anal-fin rays; occasionally with 1 or 2 scales at bases of posteriormost fin rays in larger specimens. Caudal-fin rays usually 11. Longitudinal scale rows 67 to 82. ID pattern usually 1-4-3. Total vertebrae 44 to 48, usually 45 or 46. Colour: ocular surface usually dark brown with 4 to 11 (usually 6 to 10) well-developed, complete, sharply-contrasting, dark brown crossbands on head and body**. Crossbands not continued onto dorsal and anal fins. **Blind side creamy white, without pepper-dots. Peritoneum unpigmented. Dorsal and anal fins uniformly dark brown, but without defined pattern of spots or blotches**. Proximal, scaly, 1/2 of caudal fin occasionally with small pigmented blotch of variable intensity. **Distal 1/2 of caudal fin with single, well-developed, ocellated, dark brown or black spherical spot.**

Size: Maximum about 166 mm standard length, commonly 101 to 150 mm standard length.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Commonly taken on live-bottom habitats at 5 to 40 m. Not reported from estuaries; all juveniles collected on live-bottoms at depths occupied by adults. Rarely taken deeper than 40 m, with the deepest capture (2 specimens) at 324 m. On west Florida shelf, taken at bottom temperatures of 16.4 to 30.0°C and salinities of 32.8 to 36.2‰. Feeds on small crustaceans and gastropods. Males (to 166 mm standard length) and females (to ca. 149 mm standard length) reach similar sizes, with few exceeding 150 mm standard length. Specimens smaller than 50 mm standard length rarely collected. Females mature at ca. 100 mm standard length. Spawning off West Florida shelf probably occurs in late summer-early autumn. Contributes to bycatch of shrimp fishery or industrial fisheries. Otherwise, of no commercial importance.

Distribution: A fairly restricted and somewhat discontinuous distribution on live-bottom habitats in the western North Atlantic from just south of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, to southern Florida, through the Gulf of Mexico including southern tip of Florida, the Florida Keys, and Tortugas regions; common in eastern Gulf along west Florida shelf, as far north and west as Apalachee Bay. Unknown if occurs in central Gulf of Mexico, but taken in western Gulf off western Louisiana and Texas; also Campeche Bank region off the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico, and a single citation from Cuba.



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