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ISSN 2039-0394 (Print Edition)
ISSN 2039-0408 (Online Edition)

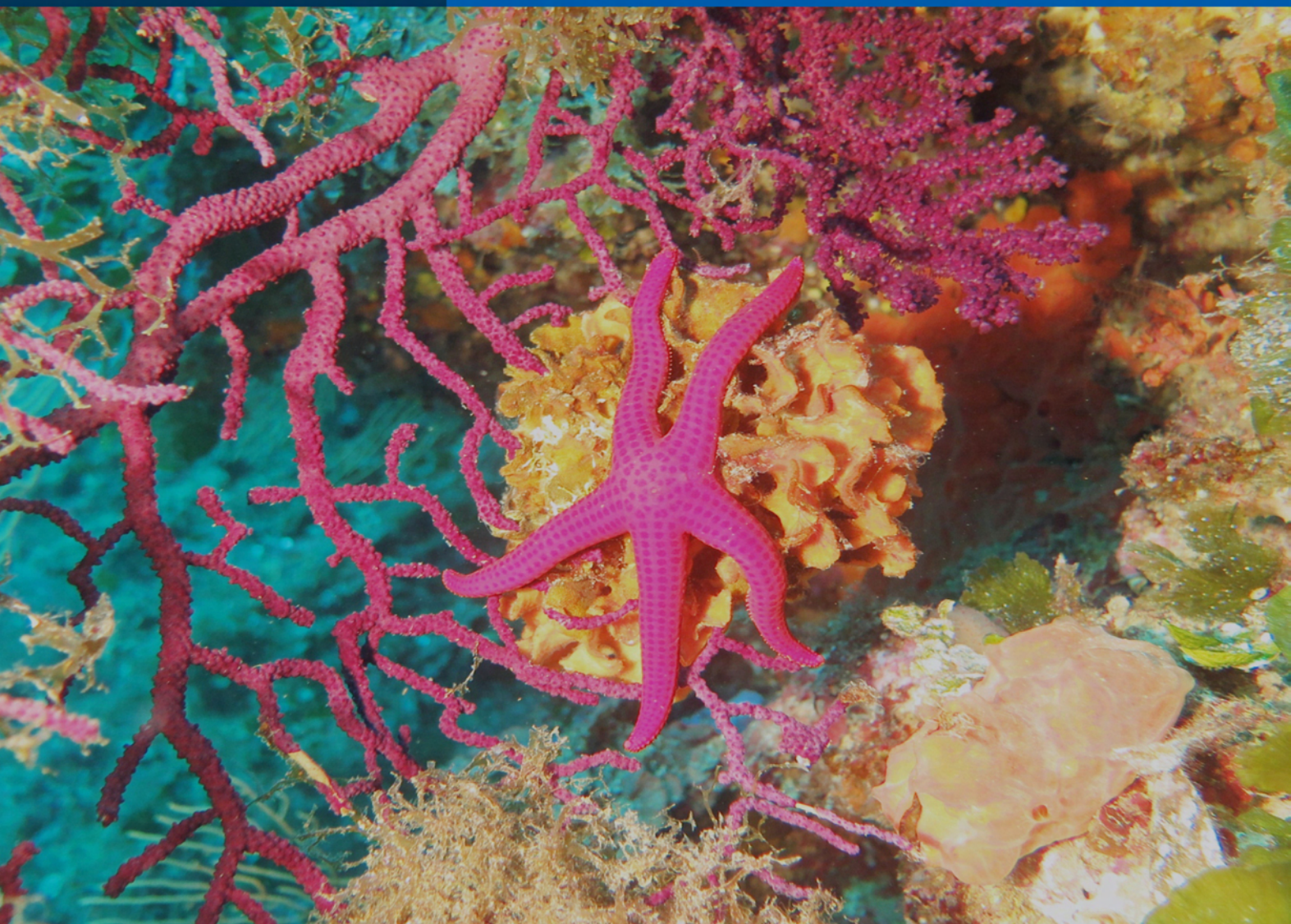
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Biodiversity Journal

DECEMBER 2018, 9 (4): 313-452

FOR WILDLIFE RESEARCH
AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES



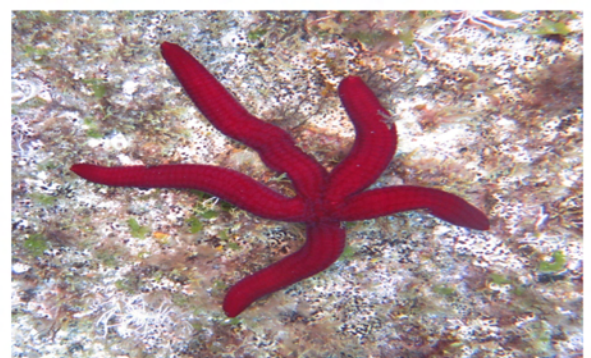
Hacelia attenuata (Gray, 1840) - Italy, Sicily (TP): San Vito Lo Capo

DOI: 10.31396/Biodiver.Journ.2018.9.4.I.II

The Asteroidea De Blainville, 1830 of the Mediterranean Sea.

The class Asteroidea include marine invertebrates belonging to the phylum of the Echinodermata. Echinoderms are among the oldest invertebrates and first appeared in the Cambrian Period, the first geological period of the Paleozoic Era (541-485.4 million years ago). The Asteroidea are commonly called “Starfish” or “Sea Stars” for the characteristic shape of their body. They vary in shape and size and are often brightly coloured of red or orange. They are widespread in all the seas of the world with about 2,000 species. From the ecological point of view, they are keystone species in their respective communities. The Asteroidea live in almost all types of backgrounds, from low intertidal coasts to deep-sea depths, as they are usually found in less bright areas or under stones. The larval stage is bentonic. Most species are predators, eating microalgae, sponges, bivalves, and other small animals. Other species are omnivorous or detritivores, feeding on the decomposing or suspension organic material. At least 27 species of this group live in the Mediterranean Sea, divided into 11 families.

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Ophidiaster ophidianus (Lamarck, 1816)