

130.—OCCURRENCE OF BLACK GROUPEL OR JEW-FISH OFF BLOCK ISLAND.

By CHAS. W. SMILEY.

On Thursday, May 15, a strange fish was seen by the crew of the schooner *Carrie E. Parsons*, Capt. Albert Greenlow, of Gloucester, Mass., about 20 miles southeast from Block Island. When seen the fish was near the surface of the water, on its side, with the side-fin and tail in motion. The men at first thought it was a sunfish. They rowed up to it in a dory, threw a harpoon into it, and towed it alongside the vessel, when it was taken on board and put in the ice-house. It was easily captured. On arriving at Gloucester, May 17, the captain presented it to the representative of the United States Fish Commission, Capt. S. J. Martin, who telegraphed to Professor Baird for instructions as to its disposition. Captain Martin states that no one of the hundreds of persons in Gloucester who came to see it could identify it. On Monday, 19th, it was packed in ice by the Atlantic Halibut Company and forwarded to Washington by express, where it arrived the next day. It was over 6 feet in length and weighed 300 pounds. On May 21 Professor Baird replied to Captain Martin concerning it: "The strange fish referred to in your letter was duly received to-day, in excellent condition, and proved to be, as I thought it would, the southern jew-fish, the existence of which much farther north than Florida we have not been aware of. The fish itself is not considered, especially when it is large, very palatable, but this specimen answers a very important purpose in fixing its geographical distribution. It will also give us an opportunity of making a plaster cast. We have had a specimen of about the same size from Florida, but I think not in so good preservation."

Tarleton H. Bean, curator of the Department of Fishes of the United States National Museum, under date of May 26, 1884, made the following report upon the specimen:

"After having examined the large black grouper which was forwarded from Gloucester last week, I have reached the conclusion that it is *Epinephelus nigritus* (Holbrook), a species which Dr. Holbrook, in his *Ichthyology of South Carolina*, published in 1860, mentioned as being rare and known only in the waters of South Carolina. It has not been known to occur in any waters north of that State, as far as I know. The species is known as the black grouper, and specimens weighing 300 pounds have been recorded before; the example received from Gloucester weighed 300 pounds. A cast and the skeleton have been preserved. The fish had evidently strayed away from its natural habitat, and its presence off Block Island must have been accidental."

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