# **Neotype designation and re-description of Forsskal's reticulate whipray** *Himantura uarnak*

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### **Abstract :**

A continuing impediment to the taxonomy of the reticulate whipray Himantura spp. species complex is the absence of a type specimen for H. uarnak (Gmelin [ex Forsskal], 1789). Here, reticulate whipray specimens were sampled from the Jeddah region in the Red Sea, the assumed type locality of H. uarnak, and characterized genetically at the cytochrome-oxidase subunit 1 (CO1) locus. One of these specimens now in the fish collection of the California Academy of Sciences was designated as neotype. The maximum-likelihood phylogeny of all available CO1 gene sequences from the genus Himantura had the following topology: ((H. leoparda, H. uarnak), (H. undulata, (Himantura sp. 2, (H. australis + Himantura sp. 1))), H. tutul), where H. uarnak haplotypes formed a distinct lineage sister to H. leoparda. Based on these CO1 gene sequences, the geographic distribution of H. uarnak includes the eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the East African coast, and the Arabian Sea. At least one lineage in the reticulate whipray species complex remains to be named.

**Keywords** : Taxonomy, Dasyatidae, Neotype, Redescription, Nucleotide sequence

#### **Introduction**

Among the marine fishes listed from P. Forsskål's expedition to the Red Sea were three stingrays, namely the cowtail stingray *Pastinachus sephen* (Forsskål, 1775), the reticulate whipray *Himantura uarnak* (Gmelin, 1789) and the blue-spotted ribbontail ray *Taeniura lymma* (Forsskål, 1775). All three species have long been believed to have a wide Indo-Pacific distribution (e.g., Last & Compagno 1999) but this view has recently been challenged by molecular phylogenetics (Naylor et al. 2012; Arlyza et al. 2013). While the first written mention of the name '*Uárnak*' rests with Forsskål (1775), the first author to have used it as an epithet in a formal Linnean binomen ('*Raja uarnak*') was Gmelin (1789), who is therefore considered as the author of *H. uarnak* (Fricke 2008). We here follow Fricke (2008) in referring to 'P. Forsskål's *H. uarnak*'. Although Gmelin (1789) hastily stated that the distribution of *R. uarnak* included the European seas, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean ('*omni mari europaeo, rubro, indico*'), Fricke (2008) indicates 'Red Sea' as the type locality for *H. uarnak*. The designation by Klausewitz (1960) of a specimen used by Rüppell (1837) as lectotype is not considered valid (Fricke et al. 2021). Thus, no type is available yet for this species.

*H. uarnak* belongs to a species complex that comprises at least six distinct lineages also including *Himantura undulata* Bleeker, 1852, *Himantura leoparda* Manjaji-Matsumoto and Last, 2008, *Himantura tutul* Borsa, Durand, Shen, Arlyza, Solihin and Berrebi, 2013, *Himantura australis* Last, White and Naylor, 2016, and one lineage, '*uarnak 4*' that still has to be named formally (Naylor et al. 2012; Last et al. 2016b; Borsa 2017). All species in this complex possess spots all over hence could potentially correspond to Gmelin's [1789, ex-Forsskål's (1775)] brief description. Authors who recently described new *Himantura* species formerly under *H. uarnak* (Manjaji-Matsumoto and Last 2008; Last et al. 2016c) did not provide diagnoses of their new species against typical *H. uarnak*. Neither did Borsa et al. (2013) in their description of *H. tutul* as this species was discovered as a cryptic lineage under Manjaji-Matsumoto and Last's (2008) *H. leoparda* (Arlyza et al. 2013; Borsa 2017). *Himantura tutul* was declared a synonym of *H. uarnak* without justification other than 'morphological resemblance' (Weigmann 2016), but was subsequently maintained as a valid species by other authors (Miesen et al. 2016; Fernando et al. 2019; Kumar et al. 2020). Several of these lineages have wide, overlapping Indo-West Pacific distributions (Naylor et al. 2012; Arlyza et al. 2013).

No material from the Red Sea has yet been analyzed genetically. However, two whipray specimens from the eastern Mediterranean Sea and sub-sampled for DNA were identified as *H. leoparda* based on the proximity of the nucleotide sequence of the *CO1* gene with this species (Yucel et al. 2017). In the absence of accepted type material, it is unclear which of the foregoing *Himantura* spp. lineages – or eventually another lineage – corresponds to P. Forsskål's *H. uarnak*. Under these circumstances, it is advisable to designate a neotype for *H. uarnak* and to provide a diagnostic description of it, so as to identify the lineage that corresponds to this species, stabilize the nomenclature of species in the genus *Himantura* [International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) 1999] and enable unambiguous identification to species of any individual in this genus. The purpose of the present note is to characterize reticulate whipray material collected recently from the Red Sea, to designate a neotype for *H. uarnak*, and to attempt to clarify the intricate taxonomy of the reticulate whipray species complex based on the universal *CO1* barcode.

#### **Materials and methods**

Thirteen reticulate whipray individuals were captured on shallow-water sand flats of the eastern shore of the central Red Sea between 2016 and 2019: eight were captured near the coastal town of Thuwal, Saudi Arabia (22.313°N 39.090°E); the other five were captured approximately 15 km offshore on Sirrayn Island (19.616°N 40.647°E) in the Farasan Banks region of Saudi Arabia (Fig. 1). Specimen identification numbers and sampling details are provided in Supplementary Table S1. All live specimens were photographed, measured, and a small section of the pelvic fin was excised

as genetic material. One individual [no. KAUST-RSRC-H006 (H006)] was retained whole as voucher specimen to be deposited in a museum collection; it was euthanized by immersion in icerefrigerated seawater; so was another specimen (H009) whose jaws and tissue sample were preserved. The other individuals were released at their capture site within minutes after their capture. An additional tissue sample was obtained from an individual on sale at the Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) fish market. The total length, disc width (DW), and length from snout to origin of cloaca were measured on live specimens. Additional measurements were made on the voucher specimen using the indications of Manjaji (2004). Pigmentation was described using the following parameters: (i) number of spots counted in a rectangular band drawn between spiracles; (ii) number of spots crossed along a line running from mid-scapular point to extremity of pectoral fin, as shown in figure 1 of Borsa et al. (2013); (iii) dorsal-spot diameter; (iv) thickness of paler outer disc margin at extremity of pectoral fin on the dorsal side; and (v) thickness of pigmented outer disc margin at extremity of pectoral fin on the ventral side. Tissue samples  $(N = 14)$  were placed in ~95% ethanol and stored at -20°C until further processing.

Genomic DNA was extracted using the DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit (Qiagen, Valencia, CA) following the manufacturer's recommendations. The *FishF1*/*FishR1* primer pair (Ward et al. 2005) was used to target a 655-bp portion of the *COI* gene located between homologous nucleotide sites no. 5571 and no. 6225 of the mitochondrial DNA in *H. leoparda* (NC\_028325; Shen et al. 2016) for amplification by polymerase chain reaction (PCR). PCR was run in individual wells loaded with 12 μL reaction mixture composed of 2 μL DNA extract, 5.4 μL Multiplex PCR Master Mix (Qiagen), 0.4 μL of each primer (10 μM), and 3.7 μL H<sub>2</sub>O. The PCR program included a denaturing step at 95°C for 15 min, followed by 35 cycles of denaturing at 94°C for 30 s, annealing at 50°C for 60 s, and extension at 72°C for 45 s, ending with by a final extension step at 72°C for 10 min. The PCR products were analyzed with the QIAxcel DNA Screening Kit (Qiagen) to confirm successful amplification. Amplified DNA was purified by adding 1.2 µL of ExoProStar (GE Healthcare, Piscataway, USA) to each well before a single thermal cycle of 37°C for 60 min, 85°C for 15 min, and a hold at 4°C until sequencing. PCR samples were then sent for Sanger sequencing at the KAUST Bioscience Core Lab. The sequencing reaction was done in each direction, using either *Fish F1* or *Fish R1* as the sequencing primer. Sanger sequencing of purified target DNA was conducted using the 3730xl DNA Analyzer (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, USA).

Reticulate whipray *CO1* gene sequences from the Red Sea were compared to all homologous *Himantura* spp. sequences available including 201 sequences downloaded from the GenBank [\(www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genbank/;](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genbank/) Clark et al. 2016) and BOLD [\(http://www.boldsystems.org/;](http://www.boldsystems.org/) Ratnasingham and Hebert 2007) public repositories, and two unpublished sequences (Supplementary Table S2). Reticulate whipray, *Himantura* spp. *CO1* gene sequences from GenBank and BOLD were labelled '*H. astra*' (*N* = 1), '*H. australis*' (*N* = 1), '*H. fava*' (*N* = 1), '*H. leoparda*' (*N* = 85), '*H. tutul*' (*N* = 30), '*H. uarnak*' (*N* = 62), '*H. uarnak* i' (*N* = 2), '*H. uarnak* ii' (*N* = 3), '*H. uarnak* iii' (*N*  $=$  3), '*H. undulata*' ( $N = 11$ ), "*Himantura* sp.' ( $N = 1$ ) and "*Urogymnus asperrimus*' ( $N = 1$ ) (Supplementary Table S2). Partial nucleotide sequences of the *CO1* gene were aligned and trimmed to a core length of 613 bp using the BioEdit sequence editing software (Hall 1999). The nucleotide sequences were sorted by species and nucleotide synapomorphies were then assessed visually.

A maximum-likelihood (ML; Felsenstein 1981) tree of partial *CO1* gene sequences was constructed using the MEGA X package (Kumar et al. 2018). All three codon positions were included. Of all models tested under MEGA X, the HKY model (Hasegawa et al. 1985) had the lowest Bayesian information score. A discrete Gamma distribution was used to model evolutionary rate differences among sites  $(G = 1.19)$  and some sites were allowed to be evolutionarily invariable. GenBank sequences nos. EU398838, EU398867, EU398869, JF493649, KF899470, KF899491, KM073002, KM073006 and KP641389 (*Maculabatis* spp.), EU398849, KF899499, KM072993, KM073009 and KM073010 (*Pateobatis* spp.), EU398860, FJ384709, KF899521, KF899528, KM072995 and KR003772 (*Brevitrygon* spp.) and KF965292 were included as an outgroup to root the tree. Mean nucleotide distances between and within lineages were estimated using the Maximum Composite Likelihood model under MEGA X.

The Assemble Species by Automatic Partitioning (ASAP; Puillandre et al. 2021) algorithm was used to partition the DNA sequence dataset into species hypotheses. The alignment of ingroup sequences (*N* = 216) in FASTA format was uploaded to the ASAP website at the Museum national d'histoire naturelle, Paris (https://bioinfo.mnhn.fr/abi/public/asap/; accessed 06 February 2021). We used the default options of ASAP and the genetic distances were estimated using the Kimura-2-parameter substitution model. The general mixed Yule coalescent (GMYC) algorithm (Pons et al. 2006) was also used to the same purpose. The GMYC algorithm implemented in the program SPLITS under R (R Development Core Team 2011; Fujisawa & Barraclough 2013) compares the branching patterns that are consistent with coalescent and speciation processes. We used BEAST v. 2.6.1 (Bouckaert et al. 2019) to construct an ultrametric tree, assuming a non-calibrated relaxed lognormal clock, a Yule tree prior, and the HKY model of nucleotide substitution. The run included a total of  $10^6$  Markov chain-Monte Carlo generations, which were sampled to obtain  $10,000$ genealogies and model parameter values. Inspection of the output in TRACER v. 1.5 (Drummond and Rambaut 2007) helped confirm that the sampling scheme was correct. The sampled trees were then summarised using TREEANNOTATOR v. 2.6.1 (Bouckaert et al. 2019) to produce the final ultrametric tree, based on maximum clade credibility and mean node height. The SPLITS program was then run to obtain genetic assignment of each sequence to a cluster.

### **Results**

Disc width ranged between 284 mm and 748 mm. The claspers of the one of the five male specimens (HC256) were calcified. Reticulate whipray specimen no. H006 is presented in Fig. 2a-d. The colour of the dorsal side of all individuals sampled was beige and the ventral side was creamy white. The dorsal side was covered with numerous brown spots, which generally were evenly distributed and had a circular, or slightly elongated, or dumbbell shape. In a proportion of individuals, circular spots were often associated as pairs. Colour tones and spot patterns on the dorsal side were similar to those encountered in the reticulate whipray's mangrove habitat in the central Red Sea (Fig. 2e). The ventral side was either immaculate or with few dark-grey spots, apart from the outer margin of the posterior half of the disk which had a pale greyish hue with densely distributed small, darkgrey spots. A summary of the measurements used to describe spot patterns on all twelve specimens is reported in Table 1. Dorsal-spot diameter was correlated with disk width (Pearson's  $r = 0.66$ ; *P*  $(6.005)$  and so was dorsal-spot density estimated from transects ( $r = 0.82$ ,  $r = 0.56$ ; Fisher's combined  $P \leq 0.01$ , indicating that both the size and number of dorsal spots increase with age.

The ML tree of *Himantura* spp. sequences (Fig. 3) showed the four main lineages (*I-IV*) previously uncovered by Arlyza et al. (2013) with strong statistical support. Lineage *I* comprised haplotypes sampled from off eastern Africa, including the holotype of *H. tutul*, to the Sulu Sea. Lineage-*I* haplotypes have been previously identified as either '*H. leoparda*' (Lim et al. 2015; Bineesh et al. 2017; Mohd-Arshaad & Jamaludin 2018), '*H. tutul*' (Arlyza et al. 2013; Borsa et al. 2013), '*H. uarnak*', '*H. uarnak* i', '*H. uarnak* ii', '*H. uarnak* iii' (Bineesh et al. 2017; Gouws 2020; Hanner 2020), '*Himantura* sp.' (Hanner 2020), or '*Urogymnus asperrimus*' (Priyanga et al. 2013). Lineage *II* comprised haplotypes sampled from the Arabian Sea to the Sulu Sea, all identified as either '*H. fava*' (Ward et al. 2005) or '*H. undulata*' (Arlyza et al. 2013; Lim et al. 2015; Bineesh et al. 2017; Mohd-Arshaad & Jamaludin 2018; Segura-Garcia & Yain Tun 2018; Ahmed et al. 2019; present work). Further partitions were distinguished within lineage *III*. Lineage *III<sup>1</sup>* included two sequences sampled from the Sulu Sea so far labelled '*H. uarnak*' and '*H. uarnak* ii', respectively (Lim et al. 2015; Hanner 2020) while lineage  $III_2$  included haplotypes sampled from tropical Australia exclusively and so far referred to as either '*H. astra*' (Cerutti-Pereyra et al. 2012), '*H. australis*' (Appleyard 2020), '*H. leoparda*' (Cerutti-Pereyra et al. 2012), or '*H. uarnak*' (Cerutti-Pereyra et al. 2012 ; Appleyard 2020 ; McGrouther 2020). Haplogroup *III3*, which in the ML tree was paraphyletic with *III2*, exclusively comprised haplotypes sampled from the Coral Triangle and labelled either '*H. uarnak*' (Arlyza et al. 2013; Santos et al. 2014; Lim et al. 2015; Mohd Arshaad & Jamaludin 2018; Appleyard 2020; Hanner 2020; Mohd Arshaad 2020) or '*H. uarnak* i' (Hanner 2020). All *Himantura* spp. *CO1* gene sequences sampled from the Red Sea clustered into a single, highly distinctive and statistically strongly supported lineage  $IV_2$ , also including haplotypes from the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Natal (South Africa) and the Arabian Sea. These were initially assigned to either '*H. leoparda*' (Bineesh et al. 2017; Yucel et al. 2017) or '*H. uarnak*' (Steinke et al. 2011). Lineage *IV<sup>1</sup>* which was sister to *IV<sup>2</sup>* exclusively comprised haplotypes from a geographic region spanning from India to the Coral Triangle. These were initially identified as either '*H. leoparda*' (Arlyza et al. 2013; Shen et al. 2016; Appleyard 2017; Ravi et al. 2019) or '*H. undulata*' (Appleyard 2020). Lineage *IV*<sup>2</sup> specific to the Red Sea and adjacent localities was separated from lineage  $IV_1$  by 1.8% nucleotide distance at the *CO1* locus. The mean nucleotide distance was 0.3% within sub-clade  $IV_1$  and 0.4% within sub-clade  $IV_2$ .

The ASAP species delineation algorithm distinguished either three, four, six, seven, or eight hypothetical species in the genus *Himantura*. All five partitions coincided with partitions derived from the ML phylogeny (Fig. 3). Further ASAP partitions (i.e. from 12 up to 25 distinct species) were less probable. The three- and four-species hypotheses were deemed too conservative as they failed to recognize *H. australis* as a distinct species. Therefore, the six-, seven- and eight-species partitions, which had approximately equally high probabilities, were the only three hypotheses retained (Fig. 3c-e). Lineage  $IV_2$  was identified as a distinct species in all three hypotheses. Of the three, the seven-species hypothesis was the one that scored best; a convenient threshold genetic distance (> 0.01) was associated with it. The most likely outcome of GMYC clustering was the nine-species partition represented in Fig. 3f, with a confidence interval of six to 11 species. A consensual partition based on the ML tree topology, the geographic distribution of lineages, the sevenspecies hypothesis resulting from ASAP partitioning and a conservative interpretation of the GMYC partition was eventually retained (Fig. 3g).

#### **Discussion**

The taxonomic value of mitochondrial DNA sequences has been demonstrated in morphologically intractable species complexes in Elasmobranchs such as those of the long-tailed butterfly ray *Gymnura poecilura* (Naylor et al. 2012 ; Muktha et al. 2018), the whitespotted whipray *Maculabatis gerrardi* (Ward et al. 2008; Naylor et al. 2012) or the blue-spotted maskray *Neotrygon kuhlii* (Naylor et al. 2012; Puckridge et al. 2013; Borsa et al. 2018; Pavan-Kumar et al. 2018). The reticulate whipray *Himantura* spp. species complex is another example in which morphological overlap among species has led to considerable confusion (Naylor et al. 2012; Borsa 2017), as confirmed by the plethora of names assigned to mitochondrial DNA haplotypes that cluster within a given lineage (present survey). For example, the name '*H. uarnak*' is currently assigned to no less than five distinct *Himantura* lineages in the GenBank and BOLD sequence databases.

For the present study, we collated the largest *CO1* gene sequence dataset to date in the genus *Himantura*. A total of seven distinct lineages or haplogroups were identified from the phylogenetic tree of the reticulate whipray species complex (Fig. 3). The strongly-supported, highly distinctive lineage  $IV_2$  was the only one that included haplotypes from the Red Sea (from at least two separate locations north and south of Jeddah), including that of a specimen preserved whole and here chosen as *H. uarnak*'s neotype (see next section). As a consequence, lineage  $IV<sub>2</sub>$  is here designated as P. Forsskål's *H. uarnak*. This lineage was distinct from lineage (*IV*1) which included all leopard whipray *H. leoparda* specimens from the Coral Triangle and adjacent regions. *Himantura leoparda*, whose type locality is the Gulf of Carpentaria turns out to be the sister-species of *H. uarnak*. The other lineages were identified as *H. australis* (*III*2), *H. tutul* (*I*) and *H. undulata* (*II*) based on this and previous genetic work employing nuclear, *cyt b*, and *CO1* markers (Arlyza et al. 2013; Borsa et al. 2013; Borsa 2017; Appleyard 2020) and on geographic consistency with the type locality of *H. australis* (southern New Guinea; Last et al. 2016c). Under the present seven-species hypothesis, two lineages here labelled *Himantura* sp. 1 (*III*2) and *Himantura* sp. 2 (*III*1) may represent undescribed species. Thus, the fixation of a neotype for *H. uarnak* strengthens the current nomenclature for species in the genus *Himantura*, clarifies the identity of over 200 specimens whose *CO1* gene sequences have been deposited in public databases and opens the way to the possible description or re-description of up to two other yet-unnamed species in the genus *Himantura*.

Despite the brevity of its original description, P. Forsskål's *H. uarnak* has been universally treated as a single, valid taxon in the subsequent literature (Rüppell 1837; Bleeker 1852 ; Duméril 1865; Last and Compagno 1999; Manjaji 2004). Multiple lineages that qualify as distinct species have since been assigned to *H. uarnak* (Naylor et al. 2012; Last et al. 2016c; Borsa 2017; present study) demonstrating taxonomic confusion up to this day. For clarifying past and future research dealing with the reticulate whipray species complex we elected to designate a neotype, a nomenclatural act that leads to unambiguously identifying *H. uarnak*.

Spot patterns may change with age, may vary among individuals within a species and may overlap with other species, therefore, this character should be considered as insufficiently reliable for species diagnoses in the genus *Himantura*, compared to mitochondrial DNA sequences (Naylor et al. 2012; Arlyza et al. 2013; Borsa et al. 2013). Neither are morphological measurements helpful as illustrated by Supplementary Table S3, where no single morphological character used in species 'diagnoses' in the *Himantura* literature was clearly diagnostic, save two characters that may single out *H. undulata*. In the following section, we provide the necessary morphological details on the neotype and we re-describe P. Forsskål's *H. uarnak* based on mitochondrial DNA sequences. For a justification of species descriptions based on DNA sequences, see Cook et al. (2010).

## **Neotype designation and re-description of Himantura uarnak**

Genus *Himantura* [Müller & Henle, 1837;](http://zoobank.org/NomenclaturalActs/17a8ee24-290d-4014-82d3-86b914c68d3d) species *H. uarnak* [Gmelin (ex-Forsskål), 1789], type species of the genus. The authorship of the species has been discussed extensively by Fricke (2008).

Both Forsskål's (1775) initial description and Gmelin's (1789) formal description mentioned a whipray ('*cauda, quae apterygia*') with spots all over ('*tota maculata*'). Reticulate whipray specimen KAUST-RSRC-H006 (male, 369 mm DW, collected on April 25, 2019 by AJM and CTW) has the foregoing attributes and it was captured off the Saudi Arabian shore of the central Red Sea ca. 80 km north of Jeddah. This specimen, which was allocated collection no. CAS-ICH 247241 in the fish collections of the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, USA, is here designated as *Himantura uarnak*'s neotype. This designation thus satisfies the conditions expressed in the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999: Articles nos. 8 and 75).

Neotype locality is Thuwal, Saudi Arabia (22°18'40"N 39°05'26"E); habitat is shallow sand flat ~50 cm deep adjacent to mangroves dominated by *Avicennia marina*.

Morphological description of neotype (see also Table 1 and Fig. 2a-d): disc rhomboidal, length 94.6% DW; snout with distinct apical lobe; anterior margins of disc slightly concave, lateral apices narrowly rounded; posterior margin convex, free rear tip rounded. Pelvic fins moderately elongate, length 17.4% DW; width across base 14.5% DW. Two remarkably large, heart-shaped thorns in mid-scapular region in posterior part of a line of 24 consecutive, slightly enlarged thorns, but no other enlarged thorns extending along mid-line of disc and tail. Nasal curtain skirt-shaped, broad and short with finely fringed posterior margin. Tail whip-like, tapering gently toward sting, length 230.8% DW. Small sharp thorns on dorsal side of tail beyond caudal sting. Additional morphological measurements taken on neotype after it was fixed in formalin were the following (in mm): disc width 351, total length 1089, snout to pectoral-fin insertion 299, end of orbit to pectoral insertion 214, snout to maximum width 135, snout to origin of cloaca 284, cloaca origin to sting 129, pectoral insertion to sting origin 138, disc thickness 48, snout to preorbital (direct) 77, snout to preorbital (horizontal) 68, orbit diameter 16, eye diameter 19, spiracle length 14, orbit+spiracle length 36, interorbital width 51, inter-eye width 77, distance between spiracles 82, head length (direct) 165, preoral length (to lower jaw) 77, snout (prenasal) 58, nostril length 20, nasal curtain length 23, nasal curtain width 41, distance between nostrils 34, mouth width 38, distance between  $1^{st}$  gill slits 74, distance between  $5^{th}$  gill slits 51, width of  $1^{st}$  gill slit 10, width of  $3^{rd}$  gill slit 10, width of 5th gill slit 7, tail width at axil of pelvic fins 21, tail width at base of sting 11, tail height at axil of pelvic fins 17, tail height base of caudal sting 8, sting length 79, cloaca length 2, greatest width across pelvic fins 88 (resting) or 102 (spread), clasper length 31 (post-cloaca) or 13 (from pelvic axil).

Re-description of *H. uarnak*. A species in the genus *Himantura*, as re-defined by Last et al. (2016a). *CO1* gene sequences cluster into a distinct lineage in the phylogenetic tree of the genus *Himantura* (Fig. 3). Nucleotide sequence of partial *CO1* gene of neotype, comprised between homologous nucleotide sites no. 69 and no. 699 of the *CO1* gene in *H. leoparda* (GenBank accession no. NC\_028325; Shen et al. 2016) is 5'- C G G T G C G T G A G C A C G G A T A G T G G G T A C T G G C C T T A G C C T G C T T A T T C G G A C A G A G C T A A G C C A A C C A G G C G C A T T A C T G G G T G A T G A T C A A A A A T A T A A T G T A A T T G T T A C C G C C C A T G C C T T C G T A A T A A T C T T T T T C A T G G T A A T A C C T A T T A T A A T T G G G G G C T T T G G T A A T T G A C T C G T C C C C C T A A T A A T C G G T G C **T** C C A G A T A T A G C C T T T C C T C G A A T A A A C A A C A T G A G T T T T T G A C T T C T T C C A C C A T C C T T T C T A C T A C T T T T G G C C T C T G C T G G A G T A G A G G C T G G C G C T G G A A C A G G C T G A A C A G T C T A T C C C C C A C T A G C T G G T A A T C T A G C A C A T G C A G G G G C T T C A G T A G A C T T A G C A A T C T T T T C C C T A C A C C T G G C C G G T G T A T C T T C T A T C **C** T **A** G C C T C T A T T A A T T T T A T C A C C A C A A T C A T T A A C A T A A A A C C A C C A G C A A T T T C G C A G T A T C A A A C A C C C C T C T T T G T C T G A T C A A T C C T T A T C A C A G C C G T A C T C C T C T T G T T A T C T C T T C C T G T C C T A G C A G C A G G T A T T A C **G** A T A C T T C T A A C A G A T C G T A A C C T C A A T A C A A C C T T C T T T G A T C C T G C A G G A G G A G G T G A C C C A A T T C T T T A T C A A -3'. The four diagnostic nucleotides here underlined (T, C, A, G in respective positions 270, 478, 480, 624 of the *CO1* gene sequence) distinguish *H. uarnak* from all other species in the genus *Himantura*.

Geographic distribution: *H. uarnak* specimens whose identity was here ascertained from their partial *CO1* gene sequences (Supplementary Table S2) were previously reported as '*H. leoparda*' (Arlyza et al. 2013; Borsa et al. 2013; Yucel et al. 2017; Bineesh et al. 2017) or '*H. uarnak*' (Steinke et al. 2011). Conversely, the identity of specimens previously assigned to '*H. uarnak*' are now correctly assigned to *H. australis*, *H. tutul*, and two yet-unnamed *Himantura* spp. (see Supplementary Table S2). Based on these genetically validated records, the distribution of *H. uarnak* outside the Red Sea includes the eastern Mediterranean Sea (Yucel et al. 2017), Natal (Steinke et al. 2011), and the Arabian Sea (Bineesh et al. 2017).

## **Notice**

The present article in portable document (.pdf) format is a published work in the sense of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN 1999). It has been registered in ZooBank (http://zoobank.org/), the online registration system for the ICZN. The ZooBank life science identifier for this publication is urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:B2113697-5EBF-4364-B50C-63019A1A076A. The online version of this work is archived and available from the *Marine Biodiversity* website (https://www.springer.com/journal/12526), and from the haL-IRD (https:// hal.ird.fr) repository.

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**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical approval** Reticulate whipray specimens were captured in accordance with KAUST's institutional animal care and use committee (IACUC) under animal study proposal # 18IACUC14.

**Data availability** All data generated during this study are included in this published article or in the appended Supplementary Tables. Sequences produced through the present study have been deposited in GenBank (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nucleotide/) under accession nos. MW178184-MW178196. Photographs of all specimens are available from the authors upon request.

**Author contributions** AJM and CTW participated in the design of the study, collected and measured specimens, did the molecular analyses and participated in the writing. MLB contributed funding and laboratory facilities and supervised the study. PB designed the study, provided directions, compiled and analyzed the data and led the writing. TBH ran additional data analyses. All authors read, edited and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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**Table 1** *Himantura uarnak*. Pigmentation patterns in 12 DNA-barcoded specimens from the Jeddah region in the central Red Sea. *DW* disk width; *na* no data

Specimen no.	DW (mm)	Dorsal side						Ventral side	
		Spot density be- Spot density on Spot diameter Outer margin tween spiracles <sup>b</sup> pectoral fin <sup>c</sup>			$(mm)^d$	$(^{0}\!/_{0}$ DW) $^{\rm e}$		Outer margin (% DW) f	
			Left	Right		Left	Right	Left	Right
H <sub>001</sub>	319	35	14	18	$3.1 \pm 0.4$	15.4	14.9	na	na
H <sub>002</sub>	346	13	7	13	$4.0 \pm 0.6$	18.7	20.0	na	na
H <sub>003</sub>	284	2	$\overline{4}$	7	$4.6 \pm 0.5$	25.8	25.3	na	na
H <sub>0</sub> 04	326	19	7	9	$3.3 \pm 0.3$	11.8	9.8	na	na
H <sub>005</sub>	317	19	5	5	$3.2 \pm 0.6$	29.1	25.0	na	na
H006 <sup>a</sup>	369	33	13	12	$4.9 \pm 0.6$	2.9	3.1	31.3	25.6
H <sub>0</sub> 09	531	28	11	9	$5.5 \pm 1.1$	9.1	6.8	na	na
HC127	278	15	8	11	$3.3 \pm 0.5$	11.3	11.3	na	na
HC131	310	15	10	5	$5.2 \pm 0.6$	9.6	14.1	na	na
<b>HC150</b>	288	21	11	12	$4.0 \pm 0.6$	7.0	8.1	na	na
HC256	748	34	26	25	$5.2 \pm 0.7$	4.1	5.6	12.5	na
<b>HC289</b>	580	16	15	9	$6.6 \pm 1.2$	2.3	2.4	na	na

<sup>a</sup>Neotype

**b** Number of spots counted in band between spiracles

<sup>c</sup> Number of spots crossed along line running from mid-scapular point to extremity of pectoral fin (see figure 1 of Borsa et al. 2013)

<sup>d</sup> Average ± SD, from 30-36 randomly-chosen dorsal spots in central area of pectoral fin

<sup>e</sup>Thickness of paler outer disc margin at extremity of pectoral fin

f Thickness of pigmented outer disc margin at extremity of pectoral fin

**Fig. 1** Reticulate whipray sampling localities in the central Red Sea

**Fig. 2** Reticulate whipray *Himantura uarnak* (Gmelin [ex Forsskål], 1789). **a** Dorsal view of neotype, no. CAS-ICH 247241 deposited at the fish collections of the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco (formerly at the Red Sea Research Center, Thuwal as no. KAUST-RSRC-H006); scale bar: 5 cm. **b** Neotype, ventral view; scale bar: 5 cm. **c** Neotype, spine details in median dorsal region; scale bar: 1cm. **d** Neotype, mouth details; scale bar: 1cm. **e** Sandy mangrove habitat of *H. uarnak* off Thuwal, Red Sea, 22.313°N 39.090°E (credit: M. Bennett-Smith / KAUST)

**Fig. 3** Reticulate whipray *Himantura* spp. species complex. Maximum-likelihood tree of *CO1* gene haplotypes based on the HKY+G+I model. Tree with highest log likelihood (-16139.6) is shown. Tree is drawn to scale, with branch length measured in the number of substitutions per site. Haplotype sequences are listed using their GenBank or BOLD accession number. Score at a node is percentage of pseudo-trees in which the associated taxa clustered together (from 500 iterations of bootstrap resampling; Felsenstein 1985). The first four main partitions are designated by roman numbers *I-IV* following Arlyza et al. (2013); numbers in subscript indicate further partition. Arrow indicates placement of *H. uarnak* neotype. **a** Partition into main lineages according to ML tree topology. **b** Geographic origin of specimens: a colourblind friendly colour palette was chosen (https://venngage.com/blog/color-blind-friendly-palette/; accessed 05 Feb. 2021): *red*, Red Sea (including eastern Mediterranean); *orange*, western Indian Ocean, including Arabian Sea; *paler blue*, eastern Indian Ocean, including western Australia; *darker blue*, Coral Triangle, including northern Australia. **c** Outcome of species delineation analysis using the ASAP algorithm, sixspecies hypothesis. **d** Idem, seven-species hypothesis. **e** Idem, eight-species hypothesis. **f** Most likely GMYC clustering. **g** Species names assigned to lineages defined consensually by ML, ASAP and GMYC analyses

**Supplementary Table S1** Sampling details for reticulate whipray *Himantura uarnak* specimens from the Red Sea including specimen no. KAUST-RSRC-H006 / CAS-ICH 247241 chosen as neotype (highlighted red)

**Supplementary Table S2** Reticulate whipray *Himantura uarnak* species complex. List of nucleotide sequences at the *CO1* locus used for the present work, with GenBank and BOLD identification nos. and other details including sampling locations and references. Sequences were retrieved on 23 March 2020 from the GenBank and BOLD public databases (*N* = 201) or donated by X. Chen (Wenzhou Medical College, China) ( $N = 2$ ) or produced through the present survey ( $N = 13$ ). Sequences are arranged by species and presented in alphabetical order

**Supplementary Table S3** Main morphological characters used in the diagnoses of the four *Himantura* spp. species considered valid by Last et al. (2016b, 2016c) and Weigmann (2016). *Diagnosticity*: utility of character to diagnose at least one (*One sp.*) or all four species (*All spp.*); *N*, sample size; *NA* not specified



Fig. 2 - Borsa et al.









Supplementary Table S1 Sampling details for reticulate whipray Himantura uarnak specimens from the Red Sea including specimen no. KAUST-RSRC-H006 / CAS-ICH 247241 chosen as neotype (highlighted red)

**Supplementary Table S2** Reticulate whipray *Himantura uarnak* species complex. List of nucleotide sequences at the CO1 locus used for the present work, with GenBank and BOLD identification nos. and other details including sampling locations and references. Sequences were retrieved on 23 March 2020 from the GenBank and BOLD public databases (*N* = 201) or donated by X. Chen (Wenzhou Medical College, China) ( $N = 2$ ) or produced through the present survey ( $N = 13$ ). Sequences are arranged by species and presented in alphabetical order. Type material highlighted red















\* identification of individual to species based on haplotype placement in CO1 gene phylogeny

**Supplementary Table S3** Morphological characters used in the diagnoses of the four *Himantura* spp. species considered valid by Last et al. (2016c, 2016b) and Weigmann (2016). *Diagnosticity*: utility of character to diagnose at least one (*One sp.*) or all four species (*All spp.*); *N*, sample size; *NA* not specified



<sup>a</sup> From Last et al. (2016c); <sup>b</sup> from Last et al. (2016b); <sup>c</sup> from Manjaji-Matsumoto and Last (2008)