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From the Indo-Pacific to Mexico: establishment of the Longfin Batfish, *Platax teira* (Forsskål, 1775) (Acanthuriformes, Ephippidae), in the Tropical Eastern Pacific

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Abstract. We report 100 individuals of the Longfin Batfish, *Platax teira* (Forsskål, 1775), from the Mexican Pacific. Records include first reports from the Revillagigedo Islands and Michoacán, as well as additional sightings from Baja California Sur, Jalisco, Colima, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. Individuals included juveniles, subadults, and adults documented through diving, snorkeling, and one incidental fishery capture. The marked increase in records, including multiple individuals at different life stages, indicates that *P. teira* is becoming increasingly recurrent in the Tropical Eastern Pacific and suggests continued geographic spread and possible early population establishment.

Keywords. Biological invasion, citizen science, drifting fish aggregating devices, marine fish, non-native species, range expansion, reef-associated fish

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Introduction

The family Ephippidae Bleeker, 1859, commonly known as batfish or spadefish, comprises eight genera and 15 species. It has a mostly tropical distribution, although some species also extend into temperate waters (Fricke et al. 2025). Only two species from this family are endemic to the Tropical Eastern Pacific (TEP): *Parapsettus panamensis* (Steindachner, 1875) and *Chaetodipterus zonatus* (Girard, 1858) (Castro-Aguirre 1978; Robertson et al. 2024).

The genus *Platax* Cuvier, 1816, is primarily associated with Indo-Pacific coral reefs. These charismatic fishes are notable for their long fins, a feature especially pronounced during the juvenile stages (Randall et al. 1997). Species of *Platax* are also popular in the ornamental aquarium trade because of their distinctive morphology and striking appearance. However, as they grow, they can attain relatively large body sizes, making them increasingly difficult to maintain in home aquaria. Consequently, aquarium releases have been suggested as a pathway for their introduction into non-native habitats, and species of the genus have been reported outside their native ranges in several regions (Semmens et al. 2004; Bilecenoglu and Kaya 2006; Schofield and Akins 2019; Giovos et al. 2020).

The Longfin Batfish, *Platax teira* (Forsskål, 1775), is widely distributed throughout the Indo-Pacific from the Red Sea and East Africa to Melanesia (Randall et al. 1997). Recently, this species has been reported along the Pacific coast of Mexico. Juvenile individuals have been observed off the coasts of Nayarit (Marietas Islands and Cruz de Huanacaxtle), Colima (Manzanillo), Oaxaca (Huatulco), a single adult was recorded in Baja California Sur (Cabo Pulmo) (Medina-Rosas and Moreno-López 2025; Petatán-Ramírez et al. 2025), and an additional record from Guerrero (Zihuatanejo) (Navarrete-Torices et al. 2026).

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During an ecological monitoring expedition to the Revillagigedo Islands in May 2025, an adult individual (~50 cm total length) of *P. teira* was observed at 10 m depth at Punta Tosca, Socorro Island. Subsequently, the species was documented at two additional sites within the archipelago, as well as at a new locality along the coast of Michoacán. These records represent the first reports of the species from those areas. In addition, we report new sightings and an apparent increase in the number of individuals in mainland localities where the species had previously been recorded.

Methods

Most records of *Platax teira* reported herein were obtained through in-water observations during scuba dives. Two records were obtained by other means: one snorkeling observation documented two juveniles associated with a drifting log at Tamarindo, Tenacatita, Jalisco, and one juvenile was documented from an incidental fishery capture at Las Gatas, Zihuatanejo, Guerrero. The record from Punta Tosca, Socorro Island, came from an ecological monitoring expedition, whereas the remaining observations were derived from citizen-science contributions, including records gathered through the initiative "Sinergia Azul" and additional reports obtained through direct contact with dive tourism operators from the corresponding localities.

The distribution map was produced using QGIS v. 3.44 (QGIS Development Team 2025), based on the geographic coordinates of the records reported herein.

To evaluate the temporal accumulation of records, the number of individuals reported at each locality and date was summed by month and classified by life stage as juveniles/subadults or adults. The cumulative number of documented individuals was then calculated through time for juveniles/subadults, adults, and both life stages combined. Early-stage juveniles were additionally highlighted because their small size suggests that they were likely born in Mexican waters. This designation does not imply that larger juveniles or adults originated outside Mexico, as some of these individuals may also have been born in Mexican waters. However, because of their larger size and more advanced developmental stage, it is not possible to distinguish whether they originated locally or reached Mexican waters through dispersal associated with flotsam.

Results

***Platax teira* (Forsskål, 1775)**

Figures 1–3

New records. MEXICO — Baja California Sur • Cabo Pulmo, El Vencedor; 23.455°N, 109.416°W; 15 m depth; 18 Dec. 2025; A. Mishell obs.; 2 spec. (Figure 2A) • Same locality; 22 Jan. 2026; N. Villaseñor obs.; 5 spec. (Figure 3A) • San José del Cabo, Barco Hundido; 23.063°N, 109.642°W; 10 m depth; 03 Dec. 2025; FJ. Gutiérrez obs.; 3 spec. (Figure 3B) — Jalisco • Puerto Vallarta, Barco Hundido; 20.555°N, 105.271°W; 20 m depth; 04 Nov. 2025; RS. Bárcenas Chávez obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 3C) • El Chimo; 20.538°N, 105.645°W; 20 m depth; 02 Jul. 2026; G. Timms obs.; 29 spec. (Figure 2B) • Same locality; 14 m depth; 02 Jul. 2026; G. Timms obs.; 2 spec. (Figures 2C, 3D) • Tenacatita, La Solitaria; 19.273°N, 104.898°W; 5–15 m depth; 16 Aug. 2025; M. Ponce obs.; 6 spec. (Figure 2D) • La Escondida; 19.276°N, 104.895°W; 5 m depth; 15 Nov. 2025; M. Ponce obs.; 11 spec. (Figure 2E) • Tamarindo; 19.256°N, 104.814°W; 0–1 m depth; 16 Nov 2025; M. Ponce obs.; 2 spec. (Figure 3E) — Colima • Revillagigedo Islands, Socorro Island, Punta Tosca; 18.780°N, 111.047°W; 10 m depth; 28 May 2025; A. Tamayo-Macklis obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 2F) • Cabo Pearce; 18.778°N, 110.907°W; 20 m depth; 10 Jan. 2026; A. González Cibrián obs.; 3 spec. (Figure 3F) • Same locality; 13 May 2026; A. González Cibrán obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 3G) • Same locality; 18 m depth; 09–15 May 2026; A. Munguia Vega obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 3H) • Revillagigedo Islands, Roca Partida; 19.009°N, 112.069°W; 15 m depth; 02 Dec. 2025; J.L. Prada and L. Aguilera obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 2G) • Same locality; 18 m depth; 11 May 2026; A. González Cibrán obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 2H) • Manzanillo, Playa Campos; 19.000°N, 104.277°W; 3 m depth; 21 Jan. 2026; M. Castellón obs.; 12 spec. (Figure 3I) • Las Hadas; 19.099°N, 104.343°W; 10 m depth; 24 Feb. 2022; M.P.H. Carpentier obs.; 2 spec. (Figure 2J) — Michoacán • Lázaro Cárdenas, Banco Escuela; 18.018°N, 102.508°W; 12–15 m depth; 22 Dec. 2025; E. Chan obs.; 5 spec. (Figure 3K) • Banco Raya; 18.019°N, 102.513°W; 12 m depth; 29 Mar. 2026; E. Chan obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 3L) — Guerrero • Petatlán, Playa Viva; 17.438°N, 101.232°W; 5–10 m depth; 15 Jan. 2025; F. Bochet obs.; 2 spec. (Figure 3M) • Zihuatanejo, Las Gatas; 17.623°N, 101.556°W; depth unknown; 12 Feb. 2026; record provided by F. Bochet; 1 spec.

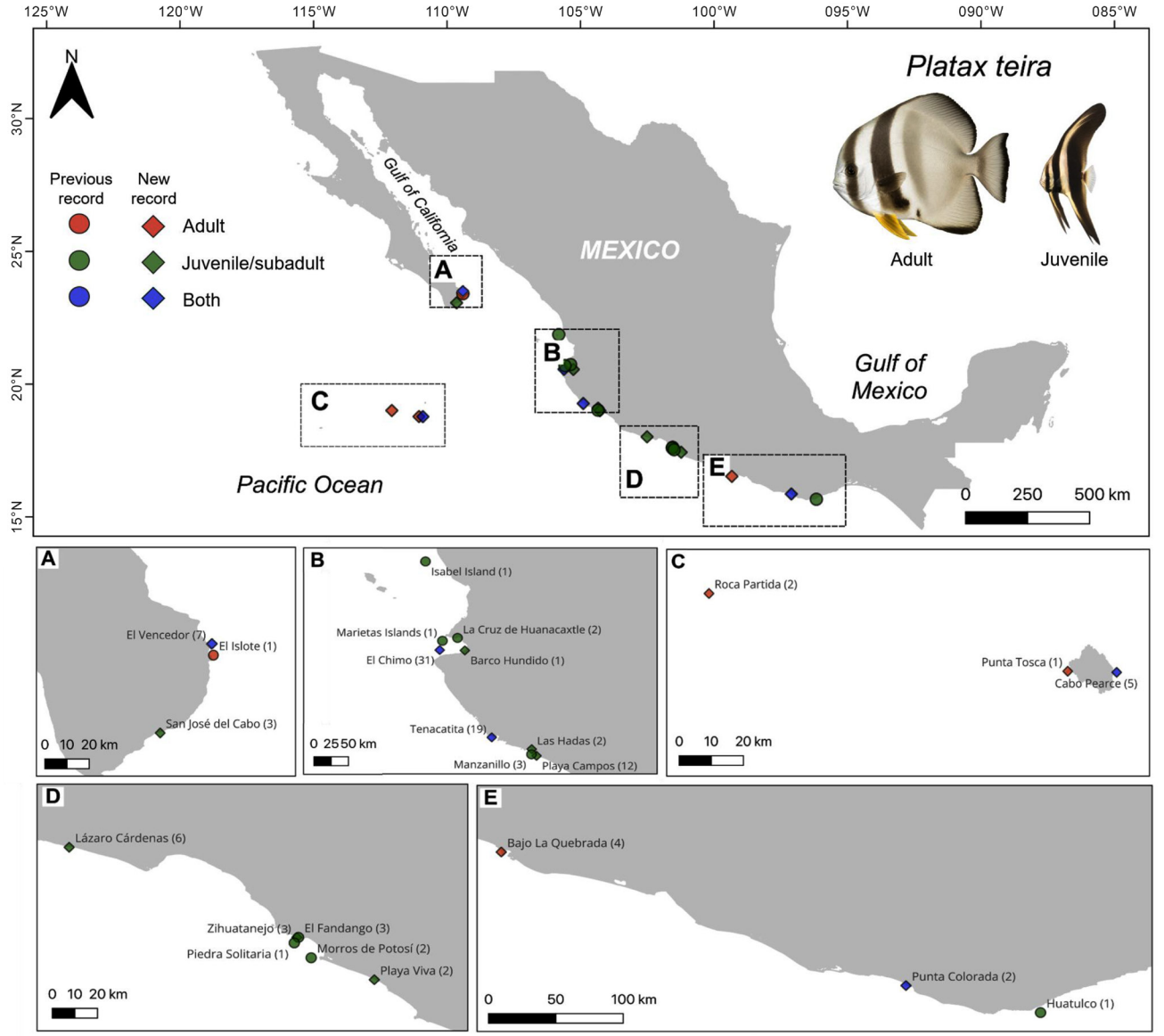


Figure 1. Distribution of previous and new records of the *Platax teira* along the Mexican Pacific coast. **A.** Baja California Sur. **B.** Nayarit, Jalisco and Colima. **C.** Revillagigedo Islands. **D.** Guerrero. **E.** Southern Guerrero and Oaxaca. Dive sites located in proximity were grouped by city. Numbers in parentheses indicate the total number of individuals recorded at each respective location. Map created by Eduardo León.

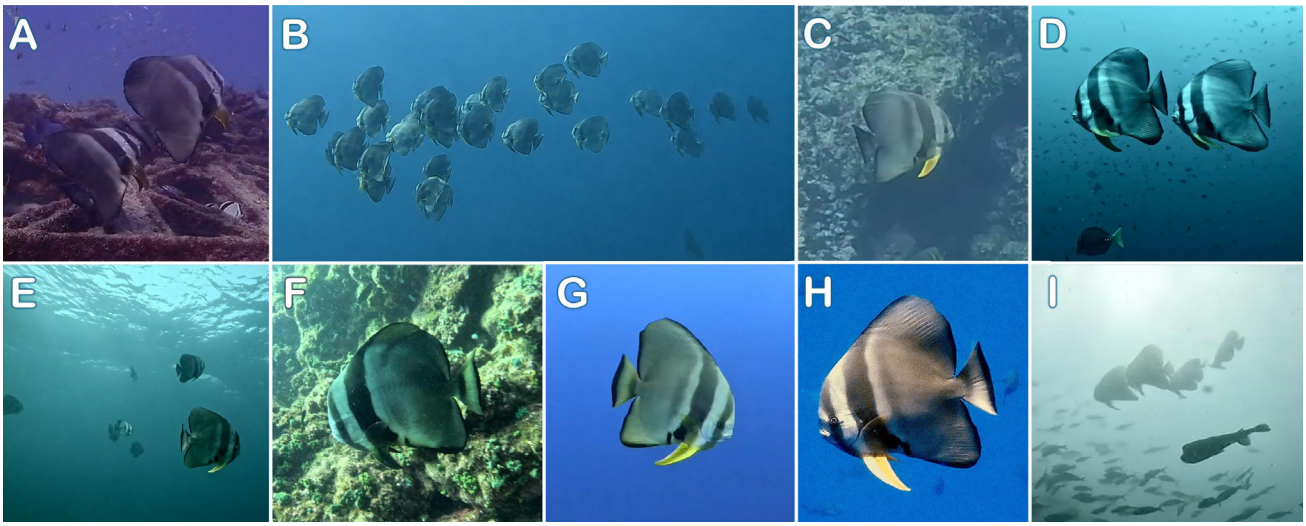


Figure 2. Records of adult *Platax teira* from the Mexican Pacific. **A.** El Vencedor, 18 Dec. 2025, video by A. Mishell. **B.** El Chimo, 02 Jul. 2026, video by G. Timms. **C.** El Chimo, 02 Jul. 2026, video by G. Timms. **D.** La Solitaria, 16 Aug. 2025, video by M. Ponce. **E.** La Escondida, 15 Nov. 2025, video by M. Ponce. **F.** Punta Tosca, 28 May 2025, video by A. Tamayo. **G.** Roca Partida, 02 Dec. 2025, video by J.L. Prada and L. Aguilera. **H.** Roca Partida, 11 May 2026, photo by A. González. **I.** Bajo de La Quebrada, 27 Apr. 2026, video by T. Adame.

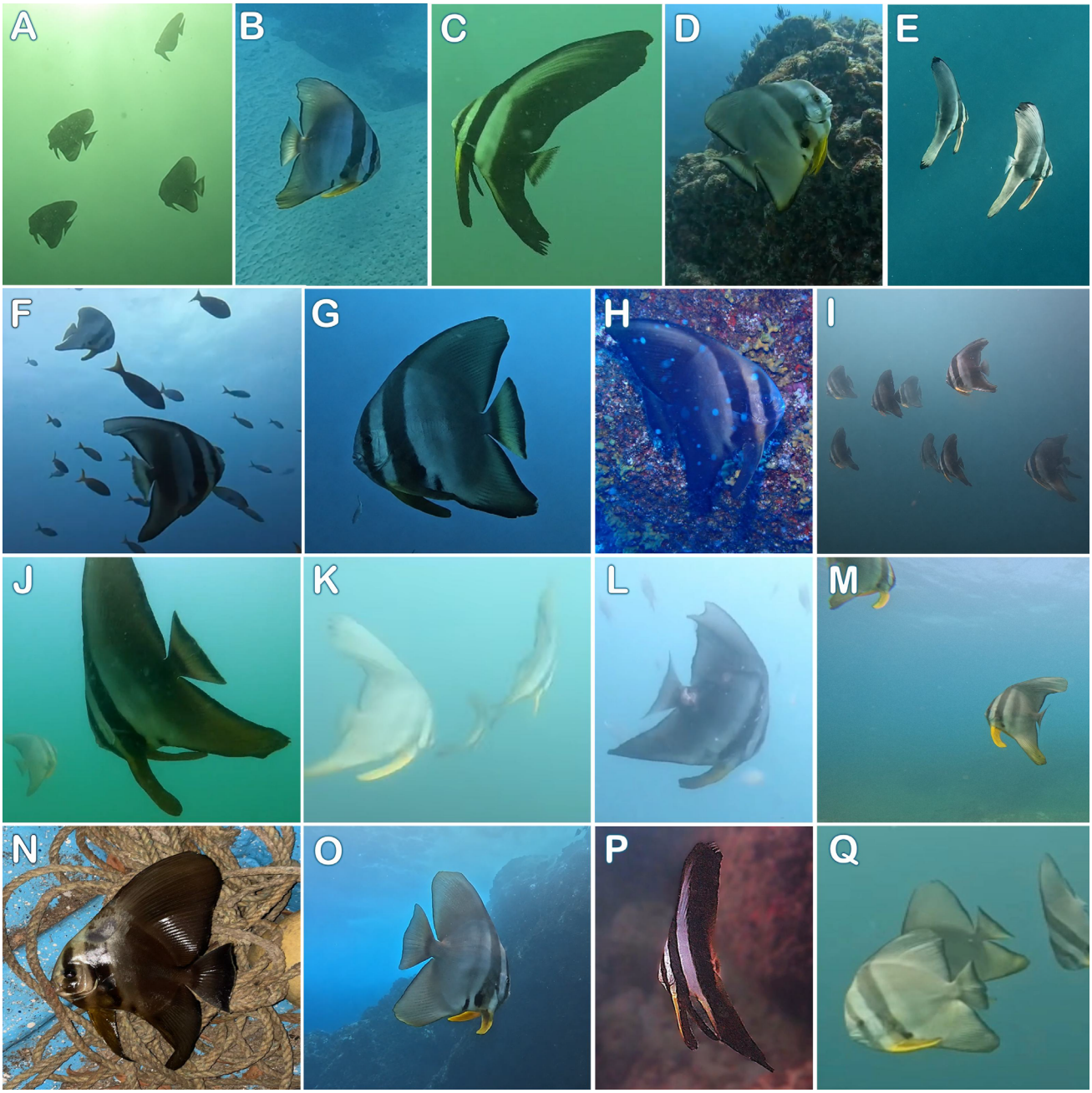


Figure 3. Records of juvenile/subadult *Platax teira* from the Mexican Pacific. **A.** El Vencedor, 22 Jan. 2026, video by N. Villasero. **B.** Barco Hundido, San José del Cabo, 03 Dec. 2025, video by FJ. Gutiérrez. **C.** Barco Hundido, Puerto Vallarta, 04 Nov. 2025, video by RS. Bárcenas. **D.** El Chimo, 02 Jul. 2026, video by G. Timms. **E.** Tamarindo, 16 Nov. 2025, video by M. Ponce. **F.** Cabo Pearce, 10 Jan. 2026, video by A. González. **G.** Cabo Pearce, 13 May 2026, video by A. González. **H.** Cabo Pearce, 09-15 May 2026, photo by A. Munguia. **I.** Playa Campos, 21 Jan. 2026, video by M. Castellón. **J.** Las Hadas, 24 Feb. 2022, video by M.P.H. Carpentier. **K.** Banco Escuela, 22 Dec. 2025, video by E. Chan. **L.** Banco Raya, 29 Mar. 2026, video by E. Chan. **M**. Playa Viva, 15 Jan. 2025, photo by F. Bochet. **N.** Las Gatas, 12 Feb. 2026, record provided by F. Bochet. **O.** El Chato, 27 Jun. 2026, video by F. Bochet. **P.** El Capricho del Rey, 12 Dec. 2024, video by R. Woheauo. **Q.** Punta Colorada, 26 Feb. 2026, photo by P. Gallagher.

(Figure 3N) • El Chato; 17.625°N, 101.550°W; 5 m depth; 27 Jun. 2026; F. Bochet obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 3O) • El Capricho del Rey; 17.623°N, 101.547°W; 3 m depth; 12 Dec. 2024; R. Woheauo obs.; 1 spec. (Figure 3P) • Acapulco, Bajo de la Quebrada; 16.842°N, 099.922°W; 14 m depth; 27 Apr. 2026; T. Adame obs.; 4 spec. (Figure 2I) — Oaxaca • San Pedro Mixtepec, Punta Colorada; 15.865°N, 097.106°W; 10 m depth; 26 Feb. 2026; P. Gallagher obs.; 3 spec. (Figure 3Q).

Distribution. *Platax teira* is native to the Indo-Pacific, with a broad distribution from the Red Sea and East Africa to Melanesia (Randall et al. 1997). Based on recent sightings, the species' distribution in the Tropical Eastern Pacific extends from the southern Gulf of California, through the Revillagigedo Archipelago, and along the coasts of Nayarit as far south as Oaxaca, where it co-occurs with the other two ephippid species native to the region.

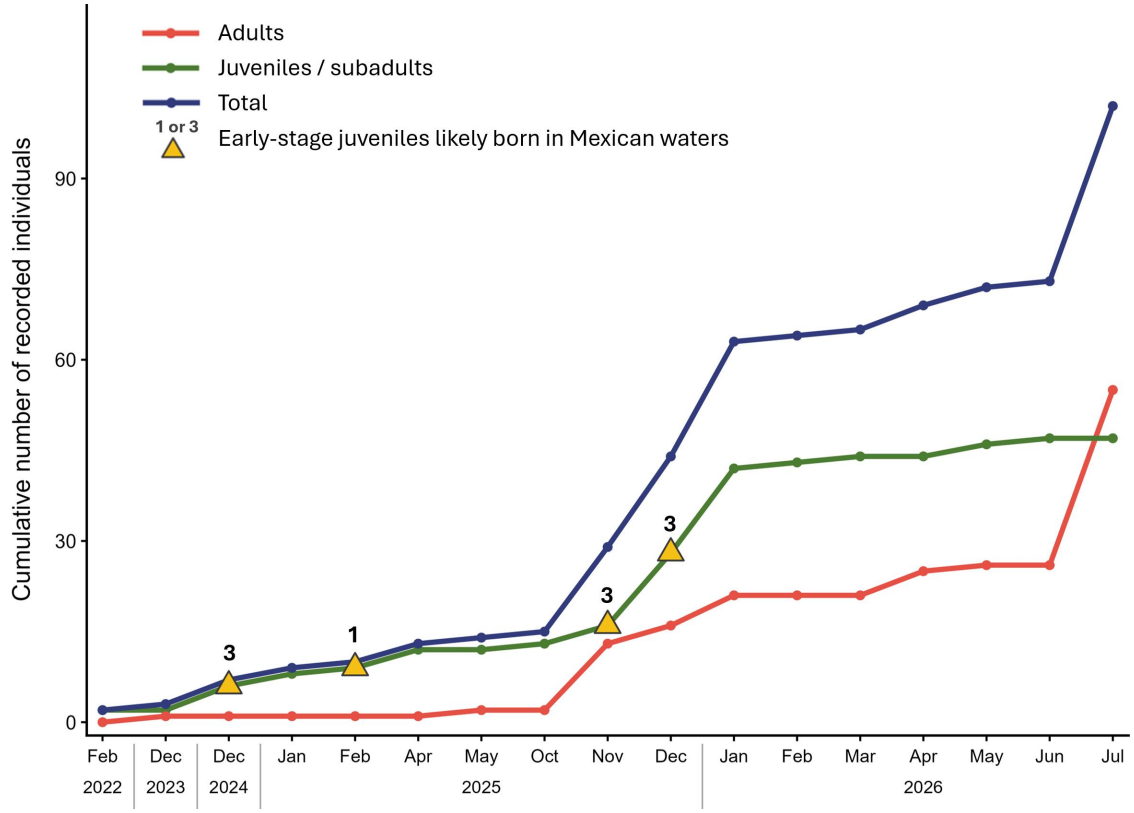


Figure 4. Temporal accumulation of *Platax teira* records in the Mexican Pacific. Lines show the cumulative number of juveniles/subadults, adults, and total recorded individuals. Yellow triangles indicate early-stage juveniles considered likely to have been born in Mexican waters based on their size. Numbers above triangles indicate the number of early-stage juveniles recorded at each observation.

Identification. Adult *P. teira* have a deep, rounded, and strongly compressed body, with colouration ranging from yellowish silver to dusky brown. They show two main dark vertical bars: the first crosses the eye, whereas the second passes through the pectoral-fin region. A distinct black blotch is located at the lower end of the second bar, just behind the pectoral fin. A second, smaller black blotch may also be present above the origin of the anal fin, although it is not always conspicuous (Randall et al. 1997; Carpenter and Niem, 2001). Juveniles have markedly elongated dorsal, pelvic, and anal fins, which become proportionally shorter as they develop into adults (Zeng et al. 2020; Liu et al. 2022).

Temporal accumulation. The cumulative number of documented *P. teira* individuals increased progressively through time, with both adults and juveniles/subadults contributing to this pattern (Figure 4). The increase became more pronounced during 2025–2026, when multiple records involving different life stages were documented across several localities.

Discussion

In this study, we report 100 individuals of *Platax teira* from the Mexican Pacific. Of these, approximately 80 are considered previously unreported individuals, based on their life stage, locality, and distinctive markings, which were used to minimise the possibility of counting the same individuals more than once. Compared with the 14 individuals documented in previous reports (Medina-Rosas and Moreno-López 2025; Petatán-Ramírez et al. 2025; Navarrete-Torices et al. 2026), these new records represent a substantial increase (approximately 5.7 fold) in the number of documented individuals. They include additional records from localities where the species had already been reported, as well as records from two newly reported areas: Michoacán on the continental coast and the Revillagigedo Islands in the oceanic region. These occurrences provide further evidence of an apparent increase in the number of individuals and the continued geographic spread of *P. teira* along the Mexican Pacific. Together, these records indicate that the species is no longer represented by isolated observations, but by repeated detections across multiple localities and life stages.

The cumulative pattern of records shows a clear increase in *P. teira* observations through time (Figure 4), including schools and individuals from different life stages. This suggests that the species is

becoming increasingly recurrent in the Mexican Pacific rather than occurring only as isolated records. Particularly important is the occurrence of small, early-stage juveniles from the first years of observation, which were likely born in Mexican waters. Their occurrence alongside larger juveniles, subadults, and adults suggests that the current presence of *P. teira* in the region may result from both continued dispersal from outside the TEP and local recruitment within Mexican waters.

One of the hypotheses initially proposed to explain the arrival of *P. teira* in the TEP was aquarium release. This explanation may have been plausible when the species was known from only a few isolated records along the continental coast, where human-mediated introductions are possible. However, the increasing number of records reported here, including groups of adults from widely separated localities and the occurrence of the species at the remote Revillagigedo Islands, makes a single aquarium-release event increasingly unlikely as an explanation for its current distribution. Instead, the current pattern suggests that broader dispersal mechanisms should be considered.

Long-distance dispersal associated with floating material provides an alternative explanation. Juvenile *P. teira* are known to associate with algae and floating debris (Francis et al. 1999; Marimuthu et al. 2005), while larger individuals can also retain pelagic behaviour and aggregate beneath large floating *Sargassum* rafts (Froese and Pauly 2026). Such associations are particularly relevant because floating material can provide habitat and facilitate the transport of organisms across large oceanic distances. Evidence from other marine organisms demonstrates that this process can occur over exceptionally long periods. Following the 2011 Great East Japan Tsunami, coastal organisms originating in the western Pacific began arriving in Hawaii and North America on floating debris in 2012, and some survived in the open ocean for several years (Haram et al. 2023). These observations demonstrate that floating structures can support organisms during transoceanic transport and provide a viable mechanism connecting the western and eastern Pacific.

Anthropogenic floating structures may provide an additional dispersal pathway. Drifting fish aggregating devices (dFADs), which are extensively deployed by industrial tuna fisheries, move with surface currents and can transport associated organisms over considerable distances. *Platax teira* has been directly recorded in fish communities associated with drifting FADs in the western Indian Ocean, where juvenile individuals were observed using the submerged structures of these devices as refuge (Taquet et al. 2007). Because dFADs can drift across large oceanic distances while carrying associated organisms, they have also been recognized as a potential pathway for the introduction of non-native species (Schiller et al. 2026). The association of *P. teira* with both natural floating material and dFADs therefore suggests that floating structures could contribute to its dispersal, although the relative importance of natural rafting and anthropogenic structures in the TEP remains unknown.

The occurrence of large subadults and adults at different times suggests that *P. teira* may have reached the Mexican Pacific through multiple dispersal events associated with flotsam or dFADs, rather than through a single arrival event. Records from Cabo Pulmo and Roca Partida are particularly informative in this regard. Cabo Pulmo is visited daily by divers throughout the year, making it unlikely that conspicuous individuals would remain undetected for long periods. Similarly, Roca Partida is frequently visited and is such a small and isolated site that the absence of previous observations strongly suggests that the individuals recorded there in late 2025 had not been present for an extended period. Small, early-stage juveniles represent a different case. Given the distance between the native range of *P. teira* and the Mexican Pacific, an individual beginning such a transoceanic journey at an early juvenile stage would be expected to grow substantially during transit and would likely arrive at least as a larger juvenile. Therefore, the occurrence of very small juveniles in Mexican waters provides stronger support for these individuals having been locally born. This does not imply that larger juveniles, subadults, or adults were necessarily born elsewhere, since some of them may also have originated locally; however, because of their larger size, it is not possible to determine whether they were born in Mexican waters or arrived through dispersal associated with flotsam or dFADs.

The increasing number and geographic extent of these records also raise the possibility that *P. teira* may already be in the early stages of establishing a resident population in the TEP. Robertson et al. (2004) proposed that, to be considered a regional resident, a species should be represented by juveniles and adults spanning multiple size classes and be relatively common in at least one locality over several decades. Although records of *P. teira* are recent (2022 to present) and therefore do not yet meet the multi-decade criteria, the repeated detection of juveniles and adults, together with the occurrence of multiple adults at the same or nearby localities, suggests local persistence and indicates that individuals are not necessarily reproductively isolated. These observations are consistent with the possibility that mating and local reproduction are already occurring, which would represent an important step toward population establishment in the region.

It remains uncertain whether the arrival of this species will negatively affect ecosystems outside its native range. While no adverse effects have been documented for *P. teira* elsewhere or for other non-native ephippids (Semmens et al. 2004; Bilecenoglu and Kaya 2006; Schofield and Akins 2019; Giovos et al. 2020), continued monitoring at sites where this species has been recorded is warranted to document trends in occurrence and abundance, evaluate potential population growth, and assess any emerging ecological impacts.

Furthermore, in a climate change scenario, understanding the phylogeographic relationships and origins of *P. teira* populations requires implementing genomic methods. This would help determine whether the species has become established in the TEP and reconstruct its original dispersal route or routes from the Central Pacific. Developing a reference genome would also support seascape genomic analyses to evaluate how environmental conditions influence local adaptation and how geographic isolation shapes gene flow between TEP and Central Pacific populations (Ferrette et al. 2023).

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Additional information

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that no competing interests exist.

Ethical statement

No ethical statement is reported.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors accept full responsibility for the content of the manuscript, including the disclosure of any use of AI. OpenAI ChatGPT was used for grammar checking and translation support. All AI-assisted text was reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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Author contributions

Conceptualisation: ATM. Data curation: ATM. Formal analysis: ATM. Investigation: ATM, LMCC, CS. Methodology: ATM. Resources: ATM, LMCC, FB, RAA. Supervision: CS, OH. Visualisation: ATM, CS. Validation: CS, OH. Writing – original draft: ATM, CS. Writing – review and editing: ATM, LMCC, OH, FB, RAA, CS.

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Data availability

All data supporting the findings of this study are available in the main text. Video records are available from Zenodo at https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21846460.

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