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Astrospartus mediterraneus (Risso, 1826) - Mezzo Canale Bank, Tuscany, Tyrrhenian Sea

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Astrospartus mediterraneus (Risso, 1826) (Ophiuroidea Phrynophiurida)
Sea stars, or starfish, belong to one of the most fascinating and recognizable group of marine animals (Phylum Echinodermata), which includes nearly 1,800 species grouped into 35 families, with an interesting paleontological history. They are present in all the world's oceans and occur from shallow waters to the hadal zone. The basket star *Astrospartus mediterraneus* is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and amazing species of the family Gorgonocephalidae. It occurs in the Lusitania Province (Western Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea), where it can be found on circalittoral rocky bottom, from 40 to 800 meters depth. The English common name basket refers to its habit to curl up during the daylight, while the Italian name *stella gorgone* and the French name *tête de Méduse* come from the myth of the



Gorgons (Medusa, Stheno and Euryale), figures of Greek mythology who had snakes instead of hair. In the Mediterranean Sea, it is strictly associated to seaweeds, mainly with the red gorgonian *Paramuricea clavata* (Risso, 1826). It is characterized by a pentagonal body, ten arms, each branched several times, with which it clings to the branches of the gorgonian host. The body has a diameter of about 10 centimetres, the opening of the arms can reach the maximum width of about 80 centimeters, the colour is brownish-pink, brownish-purple. In the Mediterranean Sea the basket star is a very coveted underwater photographic starfish as it is uncommon to find it.

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