

Who was Jacob Evertsen? Search for the identity of the godfather of some spotted groupers (Pisces: Serranidae: Epinephelinae)

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The vernacular name Jacob Evertsen given by the Dutch to East Indian spotted groupers was that of a sailor of the second Dutch expedition to the East Indies, and not of an admiral as so far generally assumed. The very few data known of the sailor Jacob Evertsen, are discussed.

The Dutch name Jacob Evertsen or Jacob Evertsz is a well known vernacular name for tropical spotted groupers (Pisces, Serranidae, Epinephelinae) from the East Indian region. Cuvier & Valenciennes (1828: 355) already remarked of these fishes: "Les espèces de la mer des Indes sont connues en général des Hollandais sous le nom bizarre de Jacob Evertsen". The name has also reached the West Indies: the Papiamentu names Jacob Peper, Jacu Pepper, Jacupepu or Jakko-pepper given in the Netherlands Antilles to groupers, are corruptions of Jacob Evertsz. The name Jacob Evertsen or one of its variants is known to have been used for spotted groupers since the middle of the 17th century. It is one of the few vernacular Dutch fish names that have penetrated into scientific literature, as shown by the above citation from Cuvier & Valenciennes (1828). Further, Lacépède (1802: 296) named a species of this group *Bodianus jacob-evertsen*, a name which at present (cf. Heemstra & Randall, 1993: 34) is considered a junior synonym of *Cephalopholis argus* Bloch & Schneider, 1801, which indeed in all probability is the original Jacob Evertsen species. Renard (1718, pl.3 no.17, pl.20 no.111) used the name Jacob Everse, and Valentijn (1726: 358, 359, 392) that of Jacob Evertzen for these groupers. I.J. Lamotius in the manuscript entitled "Zee-Toneel", which is kept in the Library of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris (with the incorrect author's name of C. de Vlaming) also showed three species of fish under the name Jacob Evertsz. The first, under no. 57 is named "Grauwe Jacob Evertsz. Gevangen op 't Eijland Mauritius 20 Maart 1690" (Gray Jacob Evertsz, collected at the island of Mauritius on 20 March 1690), the second, under no. 68 is named "Rode Jacob Evertsz." (Red J.E.), and the third (no.171) "Geplekte Jacob Evertsz. Gevangen op Paaij en Maaijs Eyland leggende 3 mijlen van 't Eijland Mauritius, den 16 Novemb: 1691" (the speckled J.E. caught at Paaij and Maaijs Island at 3 miles off the island of Mauritius on 16 November 1691). The name Jacob Evertsen is repeatedly used in other Dutch ichthyological treatises of the 18th century, like Gronovius (1781: 90) and Houttuyn (1765: 20, 21).

The first mention in print of the name, however, is by Bontius (1658: 77; see also van Andel, 1931: 270, 271), who also gave the derivation of the name: "Piscis porro hic cute est flava, nigrioribus maculis per totum corpus distincta, unde nostri navales

socii, cum primum in Indiam navigantes, circa Insulam Mauritii, eum cepissent, Jacob Evertsen vocabant, qui ipsorum Navarchus, & homo parva, & compressa statura, flava cute, plurimas similes maculas in facie gerebat, unde & per totam Indiam adhuc idem nomen retinet". Bontius' species evidently was the Brown Jacob Evertsen of Valentijn, *Cephalopholis argus* Bloch & Schneider. According to Bontius, Jacob Evertsen was a "Navarchus" with one of the first expeditions of the Dutch to the East Indies. He was of small stature with a yellowish skin and with many spots in his face, for which reason the fish was named after him. The translation of Navarchus, as I found it, is: ship's commander, captain, first mate, or pilot, in short, a ship's officer (Van Anandel, 1931, used "captain"). Cuvier & Valenciennes (1828: 355) interpreted Bontius' description of Jacob Evertsen as "un amiral qui commandait une des premières expéditions des Hollandais aux Indes orientales, et qui avait le teint brun et tout couvert de taches. Un poisson de cette tribu [Merou = *Serranus*] ayant été pêché près de l'île Maurice, les matelots [p. 356:] trouvèrent plaisant de lui donner le nom de leur chef, et ce nom est resté à l'espèce et aux espèces voisines". This interpretation of Navarchus was generally accepted, and usually Evertsen was indicated as a Dutch admiral. This is quite understandable, as Evertsen is a well known name in Dutch naval history, there having been at least 5 Evertsens who rose to the rank of vice-admiral.

Houttuyn (1765: 21) gave a slightly different explanation of the name of the fish: "Zeker Scheeps Kapitein, genaamd Jakob Evertsen, die aan de Kaap woonde, hadt een roode Troonie, zodanig geschonden door de Kinderpokken, dat men hem noit Scheeren kon, zonder in de Kuiltjes Hairen over te laten van zyne Baard, die zwart was. In deeze staat geleek zyn Aangezicht genoegzaam, ten opzigt van de Kleur en Vlakken, naar den rooden Braasem. Om die reden was, door een Spotboef, op zekeren vrolyken Maaltyd, de naam van den Kapitein aan deezen Visch gegeven" (a certain ships captain, named Jakob Evertsen, who lived at Cape of Good Hope, had a red face, which was badly pockmarked. In shaving, hairs of his black beard remained in the pits, and in this way his face, as far as colour and the presence of spots is concerned, had some resemblance to the Red Bream (*Perca guttata* = *Epinephelus guttatus* (Linnaeus, 1758)). For this reason, during a festive banquet, a joker gave the name of the captain to the fish).

When I tried to find more about this Jacob Evertsen, I encountered unexpected difficulties. In a modern Dutch biographic lexicon (Molhuysen, Blok & Knappert, 1921:179), extensive information on the sailor family Evertsen from the province of Zeeland (SW Netherlands) is provided, more than thirty male members of the family are mentioned for the 17th century. The most common Christian names being Cornelis, Johan and Evert, followed by Pieter, Herman, Jan, Wilhelm, Gheleijn, Hendrik, Nicolaas and Carel. But the name Jacob was conspicuous by its absence. Among the vice-admirals Evertsen, there were 3 Cornelis, 1 Gheleyn and 1 Johan. The name Evertsen for the Zeeland admirals was a true family name.

Then who was the real Jacob Evertsen? Extending the search to people with the names Evertszoon, Evertzen, Evertsz, Everts, or Evers, gave no results either. These names are synonyms of one another and at that time were often used indiscriminately for the same person, and, as shown above, for the same fishes. Most of these names are no family names, but mean just "son of Evert"; if Jacob Evertsz would have had children, his oldest son probably would have been named Evert Jacobsz.

No naval officer named Evertsen seems to have been on any of the early expeditions to the East Indies. Furthermore it seems rather unlikely that the sailors named the fish after one of their superiors and gave the fact the publicity it later acquired. This certainly would hardly have pleased a small, yellowish faced and pock-marked admiral. It would seem more likely that they named the fish after one of their mates.

If Bontius was correct, we should concentrate on the early Dutch expeditions to the East Indies that visited the island of Mauritius. The first Dutch visit to Mauritius was during the second (1598-1600) of these expeditions (tweede Schipvaart). This expedition was undertaken with eight ships, but only five of these visited Mauritius, the other three went via Madagascar directly to Java. These five ships, the "Amsterdam", the "Gelderland" (or "Gelria"), the "Utrecht", the "Vriesland" (or "Frisia") and the "Zeeland" were at Mauritius from 17 September to 2 October 1598. This time was used for repairs and revictualling. The island was uninhabited, but proved very rich in animal life; apart from the famous and ill-fated Dodo and other birds, the narratives speak of the abundant fish fauna, which was given a lot of attention. The "Amsterdam" (under vice-admiral Wybrant Warwijck) had a seine on board, with which a lot of fishing was done. One of the ship's log books says that the sailors "vonghen soo veel visch dattet onghelooflijk was, jae haelden met eenen hael wel derdehalf tonne van veelderley visch op" (caught so much fish that it was unbelievable; with one haul they took two and a half tons [an Amsterdam water ton at that time was about 111 litres] of many kinds of fish) (Keuning, 1940: lxix). In various log books Dutch vernacular names are given to some of the fishes, but "den meestendeel visch....die by ons dierghelijcke niet en zijn" (the most are such that are not found with us (in the Netherlands)) (Keuning, 1940: lxxviii). The species that are mentioned are very large rays, eel, and perch. The first mate of the "Vriesland", Heyndrich Dirrecksen Jolinck, in his account of the voyage also reported the large rays (two of which proved sufficient food for 30 men) and furthermore "harder, die de Portugesen lijssa noemen ende steenbraemsen ende pargos gelijk in Barbarien veele gevangen worden; oock vijs gelick been, van die Spaniaerts tiosoms genoemt, met een fatsoen gelick geweldige groote carpers ende meer honderdenleij vis, die mij onbekent is; so veele vis altemet int net hadde, dat ghij met het net die vijs ute water niet konde lichten ofte soude gebrocken hebben" (mullet, named lyssa by the Portuguese, and stone bream and pargos like those caught in great quantities in Barbary; also fish resembling bone, that are called tiosoms by the Spaniards; furthermore some resembling enormous carps and several hundreds of other fish unknown to me; we had so much fish in the net that it was impossible to pull them with the net out of the water without breaking the net) (Keuning, 1947: 63). It is clear that Jolinck with Steenbraemsen meant the Dutch name Steenbrasem (which is literally translated here as stone bream), but even that name is unusual. Houttuyn (1764: 386) gave the name Steenbrasem to a species that he listed under the scientific name *Sparus saxatilis* (= *Abudefduf saxatilis* (Linnaeus, 1758)) and a Dutch dictionary (van Dale, 1914: 1703) gave it the latin name *Sparus salpa* (= *Sarpa salpa* (Linnaeus, 1758)). It is not possible to verify what species Jolinck actually meant here, but the same is true for his other names, all of which only permit a general idea of what groups of species were actually observed.

The length of their stay at Mauritius (two weeks) and the fact that they evidently were much interested in fish (of course foremost as food, but also in the various spe-

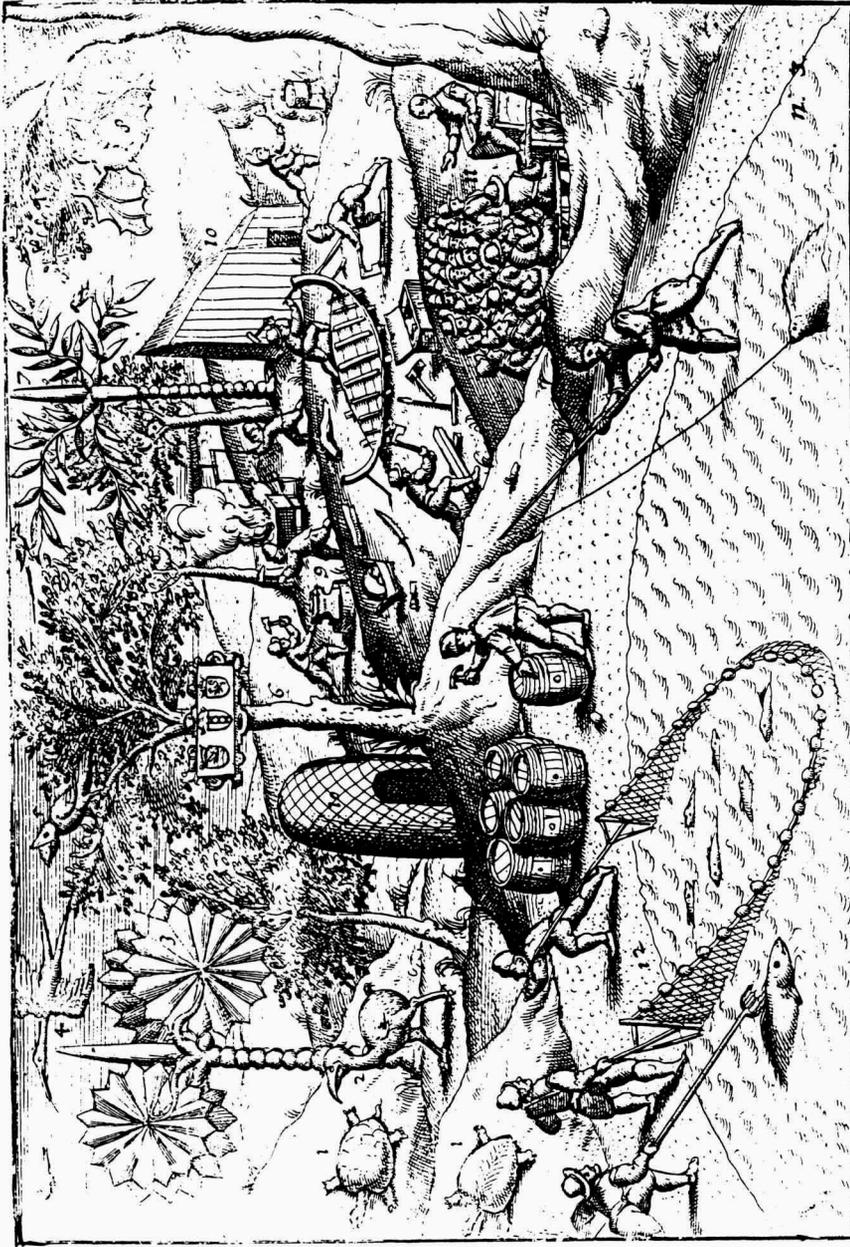


Fig. 1. The "type-locality" of the Jacob Evertsen fish. The Dutch sailors on Mauritius in 1598. Fishing with the seine of the ship "Amsterdam" is shown (no. 12), as well as other ways of fishing (angling and harpooning with a kind of pitchfork). The Dodo (no. 2) is looking on. After Commelin (1646: pl. 3).

cies), makes it very likely that they became acquainted with groupers and also with the Brown Jacob Evertsen. We know now that none of the ships had an officer named Evertsen, but there was a sailor named Jacob Evertsen. Very little is known about him, only that he originated from Amsterdam and belonged to the crew of the "Amsterdam" during the second expedition to the East Indies. Therefore he must have been in Mauritius in September-October 1598. The only other fact that we know about him is the place and date of his death. The ship's journal of the "Amsterdam" (Keuning, 1938: xc; 1947: 226) indicated that he died aboard that ship on the home voyage on 5 July 1600, at about 24°56' N, SW of the Canary Islands; he evidently received a seaman's burial. Little could he know that his name would become famous in ichthyological literature, while he himself would be so completely forgotten that at present hardly any information can be found about him.

There is a possibility, however, that there are some data about the life of Jacob Evertsen before he joined the East Indian Expedition. It namely has been recorded that a Jacob Evertsz. or Evertsen took part in the 1596-1597 polar expedition of the famous Willem Barents (for whom the Barents Sea is named). In the search for a north-east passage around Siberia to China and the Indies, the Dutch government had sent out two exploratory expeditions, neither of which was very successful. Then the merchants of Amsterdam at their own risk sent out two ships on the same mission. These ships left the Netherlands in May 1596. The ship commanded by Jacob van Heemskerck, with Willem Barents as scientific leader on board, got stuck in the ice near Novaja Zemlja and the crew was forced to pass the winter there in unbelievably difficult circumstances. The wintering at Novaja Zemlja has become one of the best known epics of Dutch naval history. Of the 17 men of the crew 12 survived the ordeal, thanks to the wise leadership of Van Heemskerck and Barents. When spring came, the ship was still stuck in the ice and had become unusable. Therefore the party of 12 had to travel overland to reach an inhabited region and miraculously found the other ship of their expedition, which brought them home. Barents unfortunately died just before leaving Novaja Zemlja. In the list of the 12 survivors Jacob van Heemskerck is mentioned first, and Jacob Evertsz. came last, showing his low rank (l'Honoré Naber, 1917: 178). They returned on 29 October 1597 in the Netherlands, just in time to see the preparations for the second expedition to the East Indies. Jacob van Heemskerck was appointed commander on the ship "Gelderland" that took part in that expedition. It is possible that Jacob Evertsen, like his former commander, also joined the Indies expedition and that he is the same fellow as the one who became crew member of the "Amsterdam" and gave his name to a grouper.

Of course much in this story is speculation. We know for certain, however, that Jacob Evertsen was not an admiral or a high ranking officer. Also that on the expedition that Bontius named as the one during which the grouper in question was caught, there was a sailor with that name. Whether this sailor is the same as the Evertsz who was a member of Willem Barents' famous wintering at Novaja Zemlja is less certain, but a good case can be made for it.

Bontius resided in the East Indies (in Batavia (= Jakarta, Java)) from 1627 until his death in 1631 (van Andel, 1931: xiv-xix), thus only 30 years after the first Dutch visit to Mauritius; this clearly supports the reliability of his observations.

Houttuyn's South African godfather of the red grouper in all probability is large-

ly or entirely based on phantasy, but his story is too entertaining and interesting not to be mentioned here. The Dutch settled in South Africa around 1560, when the name Jacob Evertsen for the fish was already known with certainty for at least 20 and probably 50 years; which makes the correctness of Houttuyn's story very doubtful to say the least.

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