

OCCURRENCE OF *SILLAGO* *CHONDROPUS*, BLKR., IN THE SEAS OF INDIA

AMONG the principal estuarine fishes of our coast, the family Sillaginidae has been so far represented by three species, namely, *S. panijus*, Day, *S. maculata*, Quoy and Gaim, and *S. sihama*, Forskal, as recorded by Day.¹ Of these, *S. panijus* is known to occur in shoals along the Coromandel coast, in the Ganges, in Burma and in the Malay Archipelago. *S. maculata* has a wide distribution in the Indo-Australian Archipelago, occurring along Andamans, East Africa, New South Wales, West Australia, Philippines and China. Herre² has recorded this species from the Long Island and Middle Andaman. *S. sihama*, known as the Indian whiting, being common in the seas of India, is also widely distributed from the Red Sea to East Africa, Queensland, Solomon Islands and Japan north to Tokyo and Philippines. All these species occur in seas and estuaries and can, therefore, tolerate considerable variations in salinity.

In the State of Bombay, *S. sihama* is the only species of this genus known for its common occurrence. Since 1950, studies on the biology of this species have been undertaken, particularly in the North Canara Zone of the Bombay State, where it is caught in relatively large numbers, especially during the south-west monsoons, i.e., from July to October.

In the course of this investigation a dozen specimens resembling *S. sihama* were obtained in the shore-seines 'Rampani' and 'Yendi' as locally known, operated at Binge and Arge, fishing villages in the vicinity of Karwar.

These, from their general appearance, could easily be assigned to the family Sillaginidae. A critical examination with reference to their general anatomy, body measurements and fin-ray counts, however, reveals that they differ from *S. sihama* and also from the other two species referred to above in certain fundamental characters in which they conform to those of *Sillago chondropus*, Blkr. This species has not been recorded so far from Indian waters.

The main distinguishing features, in which the specimens under discussion are found to differ from *S. sihama* and to agree with *S. chondropus* are the following:

1. Eyes comparatively smaller in diameter;
2. Air-bladder absent;
3. The first spine in the paired pelvic fins thickened and consolidated with the first ray;
4. The first hæmal arch invariably found on the 13th vertebra (usually on the 15th in *S. sihama*).

Bleeker (1849) described three specimens of *S. chondropus*, measuring 134-244 mm. in length, from the Java (Batavia) sea and Weber and De Beaufort,³ a single specimen, 135 mm. in length from Nias. The present specimens, varying within a wide range of 158-304 mm. in total length, are the first record of *S. chondropus* from the Indian waters.

The variations in body measurements and all other details will be discussed in a separate paper.

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Bombay-1, January 20, 1955.

1. Day, Frances, *The Fauna of British India, Fishes*, 1888, 2, 222.

2. Herre, A. W. C. T., *Rec. Ind. Mus.*, 1939, 41, 327.

3. Max Weber and De Beaufort, *The Fishes of the Indo-Australian Archipelago*, 1931, 6, 168.