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The Distribution of Some Uncommon Reef Fishes in Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A Short Note

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Abstract

In this paper, we are reporting five uncommon fishes, *viz.* Chinese trumpetfish, *Aulostomus chinensis* (Linnaeus, 1766), Sling jaw wrasse, *Epibulus insidiator* (Pallas, 1770), Yellowface angelfish, *Pomacanthus xanthometopon* (Bleeker, 1853), Black–velvet angelfish, *Chaetodontoplus melanosoma* (Bleeker, 1853) and Barred soapfish, *Diploprion bifasciatum* Cuvier, 1828 with their locality data in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. All these fishes have been listed previously though without locality data. At present, these fishes are found to be rare with restricted distribution in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Keywords: P Archipelago; Distribution; Ichthyofauna; India; Indo□Pacific.

Introduction

The ichthyofauna of Andaman and Nicobar archipelago has been studied since the 19th century (Blyth, 1846). A total of 1434 fish species reported under 165 families from Andaman water (Rajan *et al.*, 2013). In this paper, five uncommon fishes, *viz.* Chinese trumpetfish, *Aulostomus chinensis* (Linnaeus, 1766), Sling–jaw wrasse, *Epibulus insidiator* (Pallas, 1770), Yellowface angelfish, *Pomacanthus xanthometopon* (Bleeker, 1853), Black–velvet angelfish, *Chaetodontoplus melanosoma* (Bleeker, 1853) and Barred soapfish, *Diploprion bifasciatum* Cuvier, 1828 are reported herein along with their locality data in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These fishes belong to four different families *viz.*, Aulostomidae Rafinesque, 1815, Labridae Cuvier, 1816, Pomacanthidae Jordan and Evermann, 1898 and Serranidae Swainson, 1839. All these fishes have been listed by Rajan *et al.*, 2013, though without locality data. Among the recorded fishes, three genera *viz.*, *Aulostomus* Lacepède, 1803, *Epibulus* Cuvier, 1815, *Diploprion* Cuvier, 1828, are represented only one taxon while *Chaetodontoplus* Bleeker, 1876 is represented by two species in the Islands. *Pomacanthus* Lacepède, 1802 is the most represented genus (six species) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

In this study marine exploratory surveys using SCUBA/snorkeling were carried out along the coastal stretch of the Andaman Islands during 2015–2018. *In-situ* photographs were taken using a digital camera (*Canon*; *PowerShot G1X Mark II*) with waterproof housing. The images were labeled with the following details *viz.*, abbreviated location code, initials of the researcher, depth (m) and date. The specimens were identified based the available literature (Randall *et al.*, 1997; Allen *et al.*, 2003; Allen & Erdmann, 2012; Froese & Pauly, 2018). The systematic classification and arrangement followed Fricke *et al*. (2020).

Results and discussion

A single individual of Chinese trumpetfish camouflaging a gorgonian from a semi–silty coral reef at Champin Island was observed (Fig. 1A). Slender fish; black maxillary stripe present; colour mottled brown to green, caudal fin yellow with rounded black spots; a black spot at the base of pelvic fins. The distribution of this species is currently restricted to Nancowry group of Islands. This species is known to rely partly on stealth and camouflage (Froese & Pauly, 2018).

A "brown phase" male of *Epibulus insidiator* was observed from a shallow coral reef habitat in Grub Island, Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park (Fig. 1B). Body deep; dark green edges on scales; caudal fin emarginated to lunate; black lines radiating from eye. It was observed holding its protrusible mouth open, which could be a visit to the cleaning stations. A single individual of

Pomacanthus xanthometopon was observed from a shallow coral reef at "Small World" a popular dive site in Neil Island (Fig. 1C). This species is usually solitary in a coral rich reef area. Body deeply compressed; upper back and most of the body whitish, breast, caudal and pectoral fins and posterior part of anal fins yellow, a yellow mask surrounding eyes, head blue, a black spot at rear base of dorsal fin.

Six individuals of *Chaetodontoplus melanosoma* was observed from Rutland Island (Fig. 1D). This is an uncommon species inhabiting coral reefs and reef rubbles with rich invertebrate growth. Several individuals of *Diploprion bifasciatum* was observed from Nancowry (Fig. 1E). Body compressed; and yellow; caudal fin rounded; pelvic fins long; two blackish bars, one on head though eye and a broader one on the body. It is important to note that this species is particularly abundant in Nancowry group of Islands and has not been recorded from other localities of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands so far. Its absence from the other localities could not be comprehended.

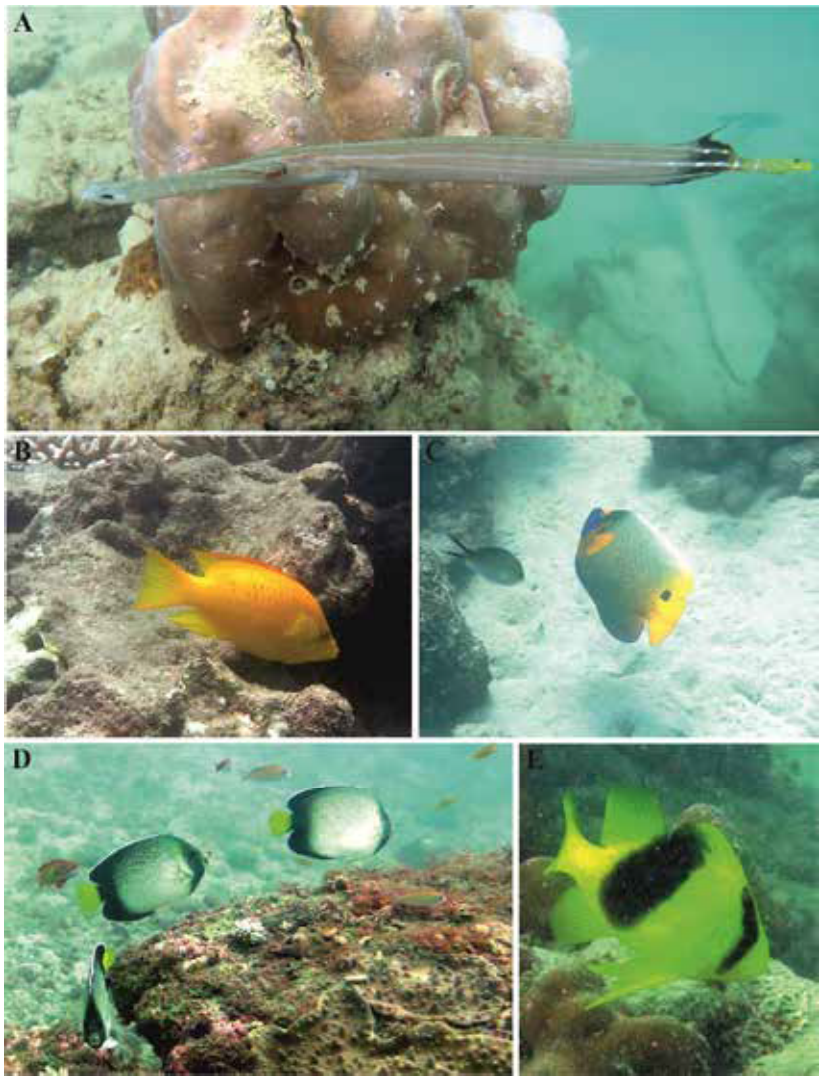

Fig. 1. Fishes recorded in the present study

A - *Aulostomus chinensis* (Linnaeus, 1766); B - *Epibulus insidiator* (Pallas, 1770); C - *Pomacanthus xanthometopon* (Bleeker, 1853); D - *Chaetodontoplus melanosoma* (Bleeker, 1853); E - *Diploprion bifasciatum* Cuvier, 1828

The locality data of all the fishes recorded in the presented study is presented in Table 1. At present, these fishes are found to be rare with restricted distribution in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. More surveys are required to understand the distribution of these uncommon fishes precisely in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Table 1: Locality data of fishes recorded in the present study

Species Name	Locality	Region	GPS Coordinates		Depth (m)
			Latitude	Longitude	
Aulostomus chinensis	Champin, Nancowry	Nicobar	08°01.719'	093°33.150'	15
Epibulus insidiator	Grub Is., MGMNP	South Andaman	11° 35.474'	92° 35.712'	6
Pomacanthus xanthometopon	Neil Is.	South Andaman	12°56.263'	92°57.049'	5
Chaetodontoplus melanosoma	Rutland Is.	South Andaman	11° 27.696'	11° 27.696'	11
Diploprion bifasciatum	Champin, Nancowry	Nicobar	08°01.719'	093°33.150'	15
	Saanu, Nancowry	Nicobar	08°02.455'	093°32.314'	11
	Hitui, Nancowry	Nicobar	08°01.543'	093°31.998'	15

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