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Short Communication

ON THE OCCURRENCE OF A FLYING FISH, *PAREXOCOETUS MENTO* (VALENCIENNES) FROM ORISSA COAST

INTRODUCTION

The marine and estuarine fish fauna of Orissa was recently studied and updated by Barman *et al.* (2007) which included only two flying fishes (Beloniformes: Exocoetidae), viz., *Cypselurus poecilopterus* (Valenciennes) and *Exocoetus volitans* Linnaeus, from the coastal waters of Orissa. The authors came across another species of flying fish while examining the fishes from the Bahuda estuary collected during December 2006 which was turned out to be *Parexocoetus mento* (Valenciennes), a species hitherto not reported from Orissa coast. Bahuda estuary is located between the inter-state border of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, draining into the Bay of Bengal at 18° 04' N latitude and 84° 24' E longitude. The specimens were collected by shore seine dragged onto the shore close to the mouth of the estuary.

Parexocoetus mento (Valenciennes)

1846. *Exocoetus mento* Valenciennes, in Cuvier and Valenciennes, *Hist. nat. poiss.*, **19** : 124 (Pondicherry).

2006. *Parexocoetus mento*: Barman and Mishra, *Rec. zool. Surv. India, Occ. Paper*, No. **256** : 24.

Material examined : 2 ex., 90-96 mm SL, Reg. No. ZSI/EBS F-5728, Bahuda estuary, Orissa, S. Rath and party, 19.xii.2006, deposited with Estuarine Biological Regional Centre, Z.S.I., Gopalpur-on-Sea.

Diagnosis : D 10-11; A 10-11; P i, 12; predorsal scales 19-20; LL 38-39. Depth 4.5-4.6 and head 3.9-4.0 times in standard length. Depressed dorsal fin not or just reaching origin of upper caudal fin lobe. Pectoral fin long, 52-53% of standard length. Pelvic fin not reaching to level of anus. Lateral line with a branch rising to pectoral fin base. Dark iridescent greenish-blue dorsally, pale silvery-white ventrally. Dorsal fin black; pectoral and caudal fin grayish; anal and ventral fin transparent.

Distribution : Indo-Pacific.

Remarks : Although, Parin (1984, 1996) consider the presence of *Parexocoetus mento* (Valenciennes) in Indian Ocean, no reliable record of this species was available from northern Bay of Bengal, particularly



Parexocoetus mento (Valenciennes) (ZSI/EBS F-5728)

from Orissa coast. No flying fish has been recorded from West Bengal coast (Talwar *et al.*, 1992). Barman *et al.* (2004) included this species in the list of marine and estuarine fish fauna of Andhra Pradesh, but its northern distributional limit is not clear. Till date, only two species of flying fish were reported from Orissa coast (Barman *et al.*, 2007), viz., *Cypselurus poecilopterus* (Valenciennes) and *Exocoetus volitans* Linnaeus, the former basically on a collection present in the National Zoological Collections, Kolkata and the other based on the report of Mishra *et al.* (1999). This forms the third species of this family from this region of Indian coast, indicating its northern distributional limit being the Ganjam coast along the east coast of India. Further, as observed by Krishnan and Mishra (1993), the northward extension of this species possibly deterred by Gangetic Fan Effect. The

northern Bay of Bengal is mostly covered by the Gangetic fan. The enormous amount of water drained by the Ganges and the Brahmaputra River brings down the salinity gradient of the northern Bay of Bengal as low as an estuarine condition. This is also supplemented by the Brahmani-Baitarani and the Mahanadi drainage at mid-Orissa coast. Such a low salinity gradient of the Gangetic fan could have been a possible deterrent to the northward extension of several species like *Parexocoetus mento* (Valenciennes).

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