Eastern cowtail stingray in eastern Johor Strait

**Subject**: Eastern cowtail stingray, *Pastinachus atrus* (Chondrichthyes: Myliobatoidei: Dasyatidae).

**Subject identified by**: Kelvin K. P. Lim.

**Location, date and time**: Eastern Johor Strait, off Pulau Ubin; 1 June 2015.

**Habitat**: Estuarine.

**Observer**: Philip Lim.

**Observation**: A male example of about 120 cm disc width and 2.8 m total length was caught on hook baited with live prawn from a floating fish farm. The attached picture shows a dorsal view of the stingray with its head pointing to the upper left.

**Remarks**: Four species of cowtail rays of the genus *Pastinachus* are found in the seas of the Indo-Malayan region (Last et al., 2010: 222-229), all readily recognisable by the plain grey or brown dorsum and a broad fringe of skin on the underside of their long tails, and all were formerly known as *Pastinachus sephen*. The featured example is identified as *Pastinachus atrus* on the basis of the following diagnostic characters that can be seen on the attached picture: quadrangular disc profile with a short, rounded snout; very broad skin fold on the underside of the tail (its depth over 5 times the thickness of the tail above); and no row of thorns along the middle of the tail (Last et al., 2010: 222). *Pastinachus sephen* has been recorded from Singapore waters (Fowler, 1938: 17 as *Dasyatis sephen*), but it is not known if it includes *Pastinachus atrus* as the record does not appear to be based on museum specimens.

A similar species, the narrowtail stingray, *Pastinachus gracilicaudus*, with a comparatively narrower skin fold under its tail, is also known from Singapore (Last & Manjaji-Matsumoto, 2010: 116). However, the record is based on material purchased from the fish market, and may not have been obtained from local waters.

**Photograph by Philip Lim**

**References**:

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