

A yellowbelly dottyback off Pulau Satumu

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Subject: Yellowbelly dottyback, *Pseudochromis ransonneti* (Teleostei: Pseudochromidae).

Subject identified by: Author and Kelvin K. P. Lim.

Location, date and time: Singapore Strait, off Pulau Satumu; 3 October 2017; around 1150 hrs.

Habitat: Marine. Fringing coral reef. Along reef slope with coral rubble, at depth of around 7 m.

Observer: Author.

Observation: One individual of about 6 cm total length was observed resting at the entrance of a crevice among dead corals covered by turf algae (see accompanying pictures Fig. 1, 2 & 3). It retreated rapidly into the crevice when approached by the observer.

Remarks: *Pseudochromis ransonneti* was described from Singapore in 1870 by Steindachner (1870), but it remains poorly known to date. This fish has recently been encountered off Pulau Hantu (Heng & Lim, 2013) and apparent courtship behaviour has even been observed there (Heng, 2014). The yellowbelly dottyback is known to inhabit coastal reefs, often in silty areas, down to 12 m depth, where it occurs singly, in pairs or in small groups. It is distributed in the East Indian region including the south-eastern coast of Sumatra, the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, Brunei and Palawan (Allen & Erdmann, 2012).

The discovery of small and cryptic fishes such as the yellow-belly dottyback is essential to the understanding of the ecology of fish populations and community structures in local waters. Documenting such fishes is always challenging when using traditional census techniques such as belt transect. This is because these fishes have a tendency to display negative responses to divers. A combination of non-destructive methods, baited census and traditional census for documenting cryptic fish species has been suggested by Stewart and Beukers (2000). Perhaps their method could be adopted by researchers in Singapore to obtain a more accurate picture of fish communities on local reefs.

References:

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- Heng P. Y., 2014. Yellowbelly dottyback courtship behaviour. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2014: 65-66.
- Heng P. Y. & K. K. P. Lim, 2013. Some noteworthy reef fishes at Pulau Hantu. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2013: 65-67.
- Steindachner, F. 1870. Bericht über eine Sammlung von Fischen aus Singapore, eingesendet von Eugen Freiherrn v. Ransonnet, Mitglied der kais. österreichischen ostasiatischen Expedition. *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien*. 60 (3): 557-571.
- Stewart, D. B. & J.S. Beukers, 2000. Baited technique improves censuses of cryptic fish in complex habitat. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*. 197: 259-272.



Fig. 1. Lateral view of the left side of the brown-backed dottyback on the reef off Pulau Satumu.



Fig. 2. Lateral view of the fish's right side.



Fig. 3. Dorso-frontal view of the fish.

Photographs by Tan Yee Keat