

A large school of striped eel-tail catfish at Changi

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Subjects: Striped eel-tail catfish, *Plotosus lineatus* (Teleostei: Siluriformes: Plotosidae).

Subjects identified by: Tan Heok Hui, Zeehan Jaafar & Hennig Seerdof.

Location, date and time: Johor Strait at Changi Beach; 26 October 2018; 1750 hrs.

Habitat: Estuarine. Sandy beach coastline with muddy silt bottom, at low tide.

Observers: Tan Heok Hui, Zeehan Jaafar, Hennig Seerdof and many others.

Observation: A school of at least 200 individuals around 15-20 cm total length was caught in a 2 m seine net (Fig. 1) during a field practical class conducted for students from the National University of Singapore. Except for a few individuals retained as reference specimens in the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore, all the other fish were released.



Fig. 1. School of striped eel-tail catfish caught in the seine. Photograph by Tan Heok Hui

Remarks: *Plotosus lineatus* is distributed throughout the Indo-central Pacific (Allen, 1999). It is distinguished from other eel-tail catfishes in Southeast Asia by the following characters: 1) two or three narrow white stripes on the sides of its body; 2) less elongate body (body depth at first dorsal fin origin 15% or more of standard length); 3) first dorsal fin when pressed downwards, not reaching origin of second dorsal fin; 4) nasal and maxillary barbels short, reaching, or only slightly past, posterior margin of the eye (Ferraris, 1999; Fig. 2).

This fish reaches a maximum length of about 30 cm, and inhabits nearshore habitats at reefs, open coastal areas and estuaries. While the adults are solitary or travel in small groups, the juveniles form tightly packed aggregations. The dorsal and pectoral fin spines contain potent venom (Ferraris, 1999). The white stripes on the body gradually fade as the fish grows (Lim & Low, 1998).

In Singapore, this species seems to be common. Apart from Changi Beach, it has been recorded at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, Chek Jawa, Pasir Ris, Sembawang, Semakau, Serangoon River and Labrador Nature Reserve (Anonymous, 2003; Chua, 2007; Lim & Low, 1998; Ng et al., 2015; Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Side view of a *Plotosus lineatus* of about 12 cm from the Serangoon River, taken in November 2010. Photograph by Tan Heok Hui

References:

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