

## Great barracuda at Sisters' Islands Marine Park

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**Subject:** Great barracuda, *Sphyraena barracuda* (Teleostei: Sphyraenidae).

**Subject identified by:** Stephen Beng & Zeehan Jaafar.

**Location, date and time:** Singapore Strait, Sisters' Islands Marine Park; 13 June 2019, 1300-1500 hrs.

**Habitat:** Marine. Artificial reef and shallow reef slope.

**Observers:** Stephen Beng, Ow Yong Wei Long & Zeehan Jaafar.

**Observation:** A solitary great barracuda of about 1.2 m total length, was sighted at the artificial reef site as well as the shallow area of the reef slope (Fig. 1). This individual was observed foraging and several times, attempted to hunt small schooling fishes such as the fusilier *Caesio cuning*. It appeared to be curious of humans, frequently approaching divers at different instances on the same day, during different dives. It would swim up close, occasionally only about a metre away, from divers (Fig. 2).

**Remarks:** The great barracuda is circumtropical in distribution, and occurs throughout the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans (Allen et al., 2003). It is found in a variety of marine habitats, ranging from shallow coastal mangroves and fringing reefs, to depths of 110 m (Aijen et al., 2015; Lieske & Myers, 2001).

This species can be distinguished from other barracudas in the Indonesian region by its large size (up to 1.7 m in total length), bulkier appearance, and most distinctively the shape of its caudal fin, which is emarginate with two rounded lobes in the middle of its hind margin (see Fig. 2). The other sympatric barracudas have deeply forked caudal fins without inner lobes (see Allen & Erdmann, 2012: 1037).

In Singapore, the great barracuda is already known since 1861 (Bleeker, 1861: 31, 51 as *Sphyraena Commersonii*), but there have been no records thereafter. Encounters with large adult great barracuda while diving, are apparently rare, and the featured sighting is a confirmation of the occurrence of this species in Singapore waters.

### References:

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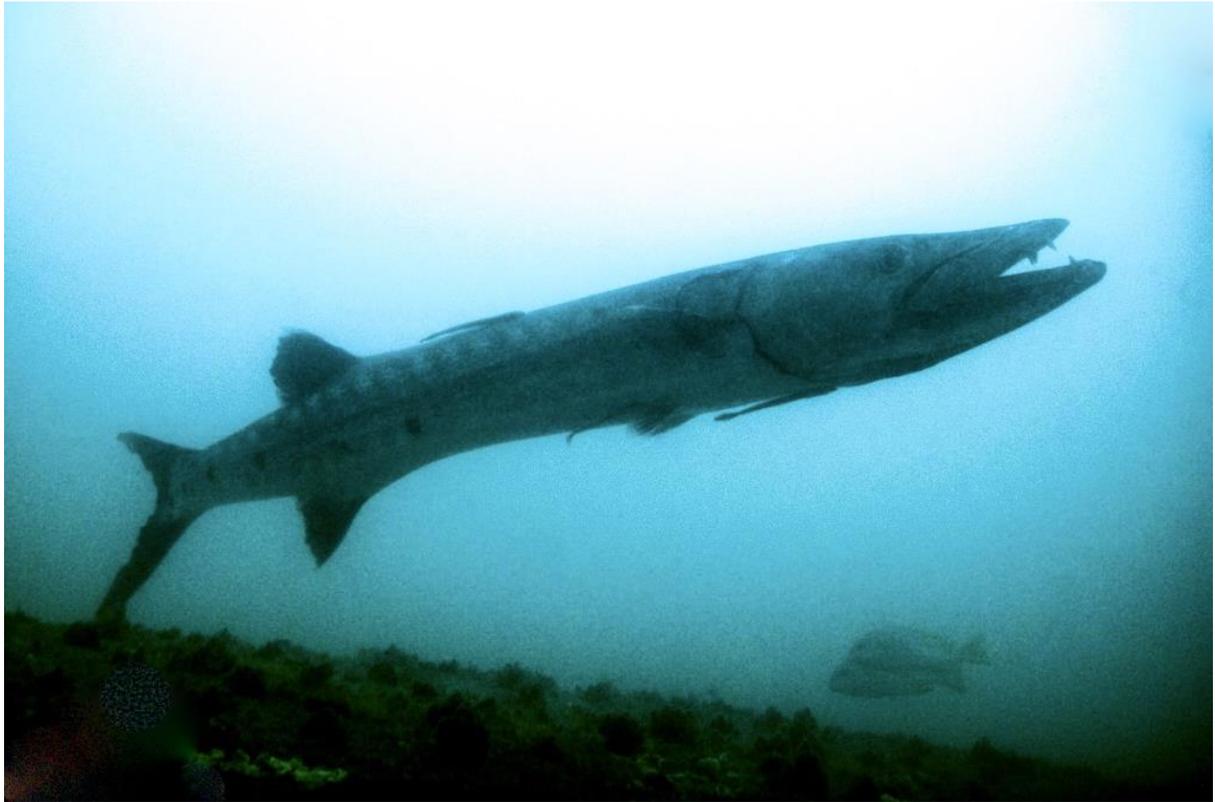


Fig. 1: Lateral view of the great barracuda that approached within a metre of the divers and stayed with them for several minutes at a time. At least four small shark-suckers, *Echeneis naucrates*, are attached to the back and underside of this individual.



Fig. 2: Lateral view of the barracuda sans the head. This individual swam away only to return again and again over the course of two dives for the day. Note the diagnostic shape of the caudal fin.

Photographs by Stephen Beng