

Long-nosed stargazers at Changi

Subjects: Long-nosed stargazer, *Ichthyoscopus lebeck* (Teleostei: Uranoscopidae).

Subjects identified by: Kelvin K. P. Lim.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Changi Beach off Changi Coast Road; 29 April 2005 & 5 July 2011.

Habitat: Estuarine beach with soft, silty sand substrate.

Observers: Ria Tan and others.

Observations: Two records of live fish are featured herein.

1) 29 April 2005 at 0914 hrs. An example of this distinctive fish, about 30 cm total length, was found in the intertidal zone during low tide. It was buried in the sand with only the eyes and mouth cleft exposed. The attached image (Fig. 1) shows the dorsal surface of the entire fish that was unearthed from the substrate.

2) 5 July 2011 at 0742 hrs. Another large example of about 30 cm total length, was found entangled in a driftnet during low tide. It was extricated from the net and placed in shallow water (Fig. 2), where it proceeded to wiggle its body vigorously. Within seconds, the fish was buried in the soft sand with only its eyes and part of its mouth exposed.

Remarks: *Ichthyoscopus lebeck* is characterized by its diagonally elongated posterior nostrils (Kishimoto, 2001: 3526). It is one of at least two species recorded from Singapore, and is uncommonly seen (Wang & Lim, 2011). Stargazers spend much of their time buried in soft substrates with only the eyes and part of the mouth exposed, but well-camouflaged against the surface. When an unsuspecting small fish, shrimp or crab wanders directly above the concealed fish, it will extend its protrusible and cavernous mouth to engulf its prey. Stargazers do emerge and swim about, and this is probably how one of the featured subjects got caught in a drift net.

References:

Kishimoto, H., 2001. Uranoscopidae. Stargazers. In: Carpenter, K. E. & V. H. Niem (eds.). *FAO Species Identification Guide for Fishery Purposes. The Living Marine Resources of the Western Central Pacific. Volume 6. Bony fishes part 4 (Labridae to Latimeriidae), estuarine crocodiles, sea turtles, sea snakes and marine mammals*. FAO, Rome. p. 3519-3531.

Wang L. K. & K. K. P. Lim, 2011. Stargazers. In: Ng, P. K. L., R. T. Corlett & H. T. W. Tan (eds.). *Singapore Biodiversity: an encyclopedia of the natural environment and sustainable development*. Editions Didier Millet with the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, Singapore. pp. 467-468.

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Fig. 1. Long-nosed stargazer at Changi Beach on 29 April 2005.



Fig. 2. Long-nosed stargazer at Changi Beach on 5 July 2011.

Photographs by Ria Tan