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THE BRANCHIOSTEGID FISH HOPLOLATILUS FRONTICINCTUS (GUNTHER) FROM THE BAY OF BENGAL

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ONLY two specimens of *Hoplolatilus fronticinctus* Günther 1887 are recorded in literature, both from the island of Mauritius. Recently a small collection of fishes was collected for me by Mr. P. R. S. Tampi of the Central Fisheries Institute branch in Madras. A specimen of *H. fronticinctus* was in this collection, apparently obtained from the Madras fish market. It is in very good condition. This adds a new species to the ichthyofauna of India, and extends the range of *H. fronticinctus* by 3,000 miles. Although previously considered very rare it would not be surprising if this species were found to be widespread in the Indo-Pacific.

I am most grateful to Mr. Tampi for the opportunity of examining this specimen and for his help to the Australian Museum.

Günther used the binomen *Latilus fronticinctus* in his description (Günther 1887, p. 550) and it is also referred to thus in his plate (Günther *loc. cit.*, pl. xlviii). He stated in the body of the text that ' perhaps it would be better referred to a distinct genus to which the name *Hoplolatilus* may be given '. This is the only reference in the paper to this name, but Norman (1966, p. 257) credited Günther with the erection of the new genus, and Smith followed this.

Smith (1963, p. 747 and plate xxii, B) gave a description of a second specimen of H. froncticintus, also from Mauritius, and loaned to him from the British Museum. He also described a new species Hoplolatilus fourmanoiri from Vietnam in the same paper from four specimens. These are the only two species in the genus.

Diagnosis of Australian Museum specimen from India, Reg'd. No. I. 15599-001 :-Dorsal : X 13 ; Second last ray extended ; Anal : I 13 ; L. 1 tubules, 88 plus 2 on caudal ; Scale rows, 105 ; Gill-rakers, 10+1+16 ; Pectoral rays, 17, all except upper branched ; Standard length, 106 mm.; Head, 30 mm. (3.5 in length). Depth 27 mm. (3.9 in length) ; Eye, 7 mm. ; Snout, 6 mm. ; Upper jaw, 12 mm. ; Lower jaw, 11 mm. ; Interorbital, 9 mm. ; Portorbital, 6 mm. ; Suborbital, 1 mm. ; Pectoral fin, 15 mm. ; Caudal fin, 28 mm. ; Ventral fins, 14 mm. (reaching just over half way to vent) ; Depth of caudal peduncle, 12 mm.

Body elongate and moderately compressed, caudal peduncle deep and compressed, caudal deeply forked. Small ctenoid scales cover body and head as far forward as the posterior third of eye. Scaling almost to tip of caudal lobes, but not on bases of dorsal and anal fins. Eye lateral and moderately large. Anterior nostril with slightly raised margin and posterior flap. Hind nostril a vertical slit and a little larger.

Dorsal fin long and low, 1st D. spine, 2 mm.; 2nd D. spine, 4 mm.; 3rd D. spine, 6 mm.; then dorsal rising steadily to 3rd last D. ray, 12 mm. Penultimate

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D. ray much elongated, 21 mm.; Last D. ray, 12 mm.; Anal spine, 5 mm.; 1st A. ray 9 mm.; then rising to penultimate ray, 14 mm.; last A. ray 10 mm.

Preoperculum strongly and evenly serrate on vertical limb, with one strong spine at angle. Inferior limb entire. Operculum with one flat fairly strong spine.

Teeth in both jaws with an outer moderate row of canines. Upper jaw with 3-4 rows of small conical teeth behind the canines anteriorly, narrowing to 1 or 2 rows laterally, and with one strong antrorse canine posteriorly. Lower jaw with 3-4 rows of small conical teeth behind canines anteriorly, thinning laterally to none inside the posterior canines. Palate toothless.

Colour mauve brown. Faint darker pattern on sides as in plate. Dorsal distally white-edged, centrally black, and basally hyaline. Anal pale with 3 longitudinal grey bars. Caudal dusty. Ventrals hyaline. Pectorals basally hyaline, with the upperside rays markedly dark and with hyaline tips. Head dark, with black line around snout to under eye and a white line below this, ending on the preopercules.

The Indian fish differs from the two Mauritius specimens in having a lower number of scale rows along the body (105 as opposed to 125 and 130). In all other respects it fits both Gunther's and Smith's descriptions.

This paper is dedicated to Dr. S. Jones on his retirement. Its brevity is in inverse proportion to my esteem for this distinguished Indian scientist and administrator.

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The Branchiostegid fish, Hoplolatilus fronticinctus (Gunther).