

## Sucker Fish (Spearfish Remora) *Remora brachyptera* (Lowe, 1839) Rare Occurrence in Mumbai Waters

Thakur Das and Sujit Sundaram

Mumbai Research Centre of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute,  
2nd Floor, C.I.F.E Old campus, Fisheries University Road,  
Seven Bungalows, Versova, Mumbai - 400 061. Email - sujitsundaram@hotmail.com

Sucker fishes generally attach themselves to many different marine vertebrates including sharks, rays, tarpons, barracudas, sailfishes, marlins, swordfishes, jacks, basses, groupers, ocean sunfish, sea turtles, whales and dolphins. The Family Echeneidae to which sucker fishes belong is divisible into two subfamilies, four genera and eight species, seven of which occur in the Western Indian Ocean (Fischer and Bianchi, 1984).

While the common sucker fish species found along Mumbai waters is *Echeneis naucrates* which is commonly called as 'Shark sucker', on 4 September 2009, a single specimen of an unusual species of sucker fish was observed at New Ferry Wharf, Mumbai. This sucker fish was stouter than others and the sucking plate was long. The fish was caught by trawl net operated at a depth of about 30-40 m, off Northwest coast at a distance of 70 – 80 km from the coast. As the sucker fish looks very much similar to catfish, fishermen had placed it along with the catfish catch. This sucker fish was later identified as *Remora brachyptera* (Lowe, 1839) (Fig 1 and 2) and is commonly called as 'Spearfish remora'. Usually this species is found on the body of bill fishes and sword fishes and rarely on other fishes (Eschmeyer *et al.*, 2008). The species is distributed in Western Atlantic - Nova Scotia, Canada to Brazil, Eastern Central Atlantic to Madeira Island (Wirtz *et al.*, 2008 and Riede, 2004). There seems to be no past record of this species caught from Mumbai waters.

The taxonomic position of *R. brachyptera* is: Superclass: Osteichthyes, Class: Actinopterygii, Subclass: Neopterygii, Infra class: Teleostei,

Super order :  
Acanthopterygii,  
Order: Perciformes,  
Suborder: Percoidei,  
Family: Echeneidae.

The body of this fish is cylindrical and elongate, possessing an oblong cephalic disc with 14 to 17 transverse laminae and the cranium is depressed. Posterior end of the sucking disc is before posterior end of pectoral fins. The jaws are broad with the lower one projecting beyond the upper. The dorsal fin has 27 to 44 rays and the first gill arch has around 21 gill rakers. The second dorsal fin and anal fin are long and the anal fin has 22 to 28 soft rays. The pectoral fins are rounded and the caudal fin is forked. The fish is light reddish brown above and darker below. The dorsal and anal fins are with faint white margin with the upper and lower posterior tips of caudal fin slightly pale.

According to Froese and Pauly (2009), the maximum total length of the species is 50 cm. The total length of the specimen landed at New Ferry Wharf, Mumbai was 55 cm and weighed 2.5 kg. The present specimen seems to be the largest ever recorded.

There were no other species of sucker fish landed at the landing centre on that day but heavy landing of catfish fishes was observed especially of *Arius tenuipes*. Since the specimen was cut at the head region by the fisherwomen for sale, it could



Fig 1 : Dorsal View of *Remora brachyptera*



Fig 2 : Ventral View of *Remora brachyptera*

not be preserved.

### References

- ESCHMEYER, W. N., HERALD E.S., and HAMMANN. H. A field guide to Pacific coast fishes of North America. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, U.S.A. 336 p.
- FISCHER. W and BIANCHI.G. FAO species identification sheets for fishery purposes, Western Indian Ocean (Fishing area 51), Vol II.
- FROESE, R, and Pauly. D. 2006. Fish Base. World Wide Web electronic publication. www.fishbase.org, version (08/2009).
- RIEDE. K 2004. Global register of migratory species - from global to regional scales. Final Report of the R&D-Project 808 05 081. Federal Agency for nature Conservation, Bonn, Germany. 329 p.
- WIRTZ. P, FRICKE.R and BISCOITO. M.J, 2008. The coastal fishes of Madeira Island-new records and an annotated check-list. Zootaxa 1715:1-26. j