

Biodiversity Record: First Singapore record of the pike conger eel, *Congresox talabonoides*

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Subject: Indian pike conger eel, *Congresox talabonoides* (Teleostei: Anguilliformes: Muraenesocidae).

Subject identified by: Roland Beckmann and Tan Heok Hui.

Location, date and time: Johor Strait at Tuas, next to Raffles Marina; 17 April 2021; around 0010 hrs.

Habitat: Estuarine. Next to rock bunds, at depths of between 5 and 10 m, substrate probably of silt and mud.

Observers: Roland Beckmann, Joel Beckmann and Yann Beckmann.

Observation: A large example was landed with a fishing rod and line baited with squid. It measured 149 cm in total length, with a girth of 30 cm, and weighed 5.216 kg (Fig. 1). It was preserved and deposited as a voucher specimen in the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore, and catalogued as ZRC 62137.

Remarks: The subject appears to be the first example of *Congresox talabonoides* and the fourth species of Muraenesocidae to be recorded in Singapore. The three species recorded earlier are *Congresox talabon*, the yellow pike conger; *Muraenesox bagio*, the common pike conger; and *Muraenesox cinereus*, the daggertooth pike conger (see Bleeker, 1852, 1858, as *Conger talabon*, *Conger bagio* and *Conger singaporensis* [= *Muraenesox cinereus*]; Fowler, 1938, as *Muraenesox talabon*, *Muraenesox arabicus* [= *Muraenesox cinereus*]; Ng et al., 2015). Its occurrence in Singapore is expected as it has a wide distribution in the Indo-West Pacific, inhabiting estuaries and shallow coastal waters from the Red Sea eastwards to Java, Sulawesi and adjacent regions (Smith, 1999).

Congresox talabonoides is known to attain a maximum total length of about 2.5 m. It is distinguished from its three sympatric confamilials in Singapore in 1) having on its vomer, a row of large teeth that are slender and round in cross-section (Figs. 2, 3); 2) its relatively small pectoral fin, which length is about ¼ the head length; 3) having 35–40 lateral line pores before the anus; and 4) having 35–40 dorsal fin rays before the anus (Smith, 1999).

In Singapore, pike congeners are commercially valued as food fish. They are often sold fresh in local markets, chopped up into sections without the head (personal observations).

Literature cited:

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Smith DG (1999) Muraenesocidae. Pike congeners. In: Carpenter KE & Niem VH (eds.) FAO Species Identification Guide for Fishery Purposes. The Living Marine Resources of the Western Central Pacific. Volume 3. Batoid Fishes, Chimaeras and Bony Fishes Part 1 (Elopidae to Linophrynidae). FAO, Rome, pp. 1673–1677.



Fig. 1. Dorsal (top) and lateral views of *Congresox talabonoides* (ZRC 62137). (Photographs by: Tan Heok Hui).



Fig. 2. Dorsal (top) and lateral views of the head of *Congresox talabonoides* (ZRC 62137). (Photographs by: Tan Heok Hui).



Fig. 3. Latero-ventral view of the upper jaw of *Congresox talabonoides* (ZRC 62137), showing the distinctive row of large teeth on the vomer. Note that those in the anterior part are slender and round in cross-section. (Photograph by: Tan Heok Hui).