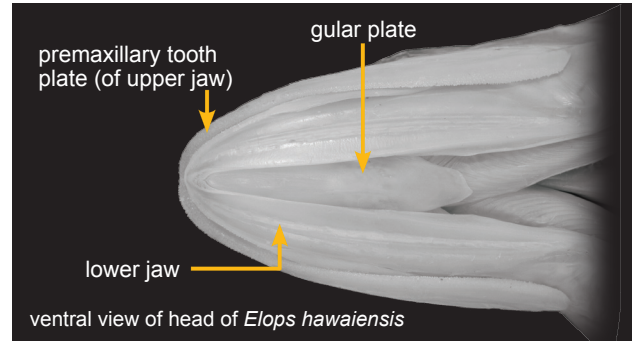


ELOPIFORMES – tenponders

Fishes of the order Elopiformes are silvery active swimmers, found in coastal marine waters, brackish estuaries and the adjacent freshwater areas. Despite their herring- or cyprinid-like appearances, the elopiform fishes are actually related to the anguilliform eels (pp. 46–51). Namely, fishes of these 2 orders are placed in the single group Elopomorpha, together with Albuliformes and Saccopharyngiformes (both of which are not yet recorded from the Mekong). Likewise the Anguilliformes and the other 2 elopomorph orders, fishes of the Elopiformes have a particular larval stage, called "leptocephalus" (or, in plural, "leptocephali") that has a transparent, laterally compressed, leaf- or ribbon-like body. The leptocephali of elopiform fishes differ from the anguilliform leptocephali by having forked caudal fin (vs. rounded or pointed in the latter).

Two families are recognized in the Elopiformes, both of which are found in the Mekong Basin: Elopidae (tenponders or ladyfishes) and Megalopidae (tarpons). These are very

compact families, which comprises only a single living genus in each. The elopid genus *Elops* looks very different than the megalopid genus *Megalops*, but they share various primitive characteristics such as a gular plate and a bony median plate on the underside of the throat (see photograph below).



CTU-P 1387 (photo: KS)

Elops hawaiiensis Regan, 1909

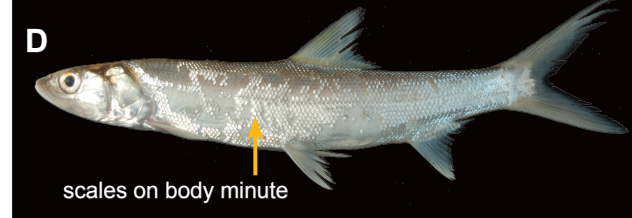
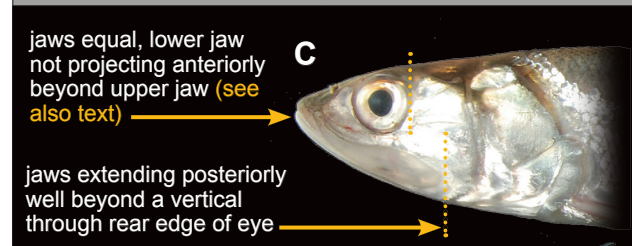
Family: Elopidae (FC: 069)

Size: slightly less than 100 cm SL (Smith, 1999: 1620).

Distribution: Mekong Basin in Vietnam; Indo-West Pacific.

Notes: A silvery coastal marine fish, commonly enters to brackish estuaries and shrimp-culture ponds.

According to Whitehead (1962), *Elops* comprises 6 living species, 2 of which, *E. hawaiiensis* and *E. machnata*, are known from the Indo-Pacific region. During our field surveys on 2007–2013, we collected some specimens of *E. hawaiiensis* from estuarine areas of the Vietnamese Mekong. Another species, *E. machnata*, was reported from the Mekong Delta by Vidthayanon (2008). *Elops hawaiiensis* and *E. machnata* are similar-looking species, but they can be differentiated by the shape of their lower jaw; namely, *E. hawaiiensis* has a non-projecting lower jaw and the complete premaxillary tooth band is exposed when the mouth is closed, whereas in *E. machnata* the lower jaw projects and covers the anterior part of the premaxillary tooth band when the mouth is closed. Vertebral counts also differ (68–70 in *E. hawaiiensis* vs. 63–64 in *E. machnata*) (Whitehead, 1962). See also the photographs of *E. machnata* (taken at Phú Quốc Island, southern Vietnam), below.



A) Marketed fish (Bến Tre, Vietnam, not preserved, photo: KS); B–D) CTU-P 1387 (photo: LXT)



◀ Similar-looking congener, *Elops machnata* (non-Mekong specimen, taken from Phú Quốc Island, Vietnam; photo: KS); arrow indicates the projecting lower jaw (right photograph)





Megalops cyprinoides (Broussonet, 1782)

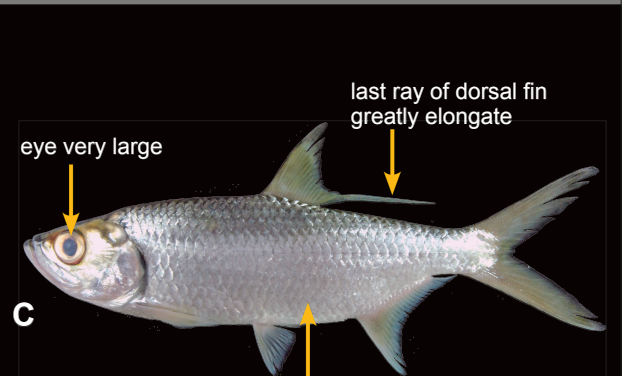
Family: Megalopidae (FC: 070)

Size: 55 cm TL (Smith, 1999: 1622).

Distribution: Mekong Basin in Vietnam (?Cambodia); Indo-Pacific.

Notes: Only a single Indo-Pacific species of the tarpon family Megalopidae, found in marine coastal areas and estuaries. As for *Elops hawaiiensis* (left page), freshly-collected fish are commonly sold at small markets adjacent to shrimp-culture ponds in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Rainboth (1996b) recorded this species from the Cambodian Mekong. During our surveys in 2007–2013, we could not confirm this fish from the Cambodian Mekong, although, in Cambodia, it is commonly seen at the markets in western coastal regions (west of the Cardamom range).

Megalops cyprinoides is readily distinguished from the other fishes in the Mekong by its large eyes, jaws and scales, and a long, filamentous last ray of dorsal fin.



a large gular plate underside of head (like *Elops*, see left page)