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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Heteropneustes microps, a junior synonym of *H. fossilis* (Osteichthyes: Heteropneustidae)

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Heteropneustes microps (Günther, 1864) (type locality: Dambuwa, Sri Lanka) is distinguished from its nominal congeners only by its caudal and anal fins being confluent (vs. separate). The other species of this genus from South Asia, *H. singio* (Hamilton, 1822) (Ganges Basin) and *H. microcephalus* (Günther, 1864) (Sri Lanka) were treated by Day (1875-78), Hora (1936), Jayaram (1981) and Talwar & Jhingran (1991) as synonyms of *H. fossilis* (Bloch, 1794) (Tranquebar, south-east India).

Pethiyagoda (1991: 165) observed that in Sri Lanka, *H. microps* is found to occur only rarely and even then, only together with *H. fossilis*, representing about two percent of the catch of *H. fossilis*, where there is a fishery. At the same time, Pethiyagoda (*op. cit.;* 1994) also expressed concern for the continued survival of this species.

Confluence of unpaired fins has been observed occasionally in *Clarias brachysoma* (Günther, 1864) in Sri Lanka (Pethiyagoda, 1994: 161), but these have been thought to be aberrant specimens.

We tested the possibility that the confluent anal and caudal fins of *H. microps* could be the result of fusion following an injury. We made a small incision into the lower hypural area—between the caudal and anal fins—of five living specimens of *H. fossilis* and found that in the course of healing, the anal and caudal fins became completely fused (in the case of four of the five specimens tested, the caudal fin was entirely lost, but when regeneration occurred it was in confluence with the anal fin). No visible external evidence of injury remained.

An examination of the syntypes of *H. microps* and their radiographs at the BMNH (3 ex., BMNH 1859.5.31.9-11) and recently-collected material from Sri Lanka confirmed that these specimens all had damaged or malformed hypurals. Figure 1 shows the caudal skeleton of an "*H. microps*" from Navinna, (Galle: Southern Province) and Fig. 2, that of an *H. fossilis* from Attidiya-Bellanwila (Western Province, Sri Lanka).

It would appear therefore that *H. microps* is nothing more than the result of anomalous fin regeneration in *H. fossilis*, injury being at least one of the possible causes. We therefore consider *H. microps* a junior synonym of *H. fossilis*.

The occurrence of '*H. microps*' elsewhere in the range of *H. fossilis* should therefore occasion no surprise. Datta Munshi & Srivastava (1988: 298) reported a single specimen from Bihar, India. Talwar & Jhingran's (1991: 691) state-

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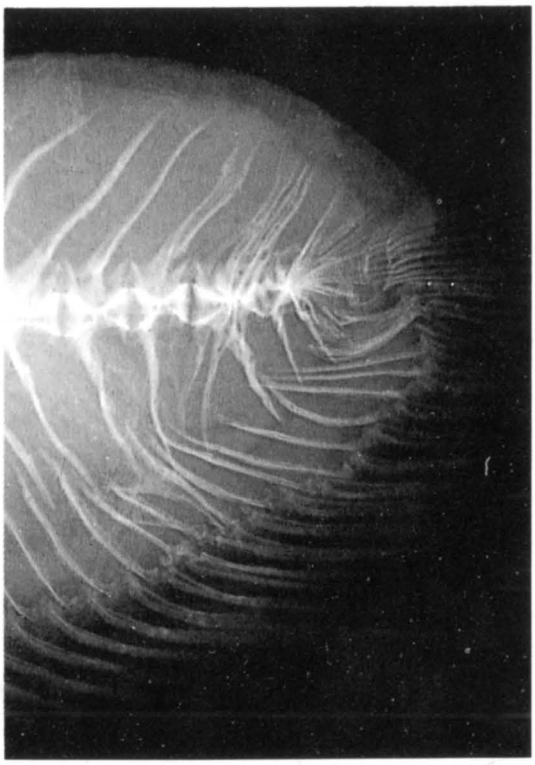

Figure 1. Radiograph of tail portion of *Heteropneustes microps* from Navinna (Galle: Southern Province), Sri Lanka, WHT 1323, 86.1 mm SL.

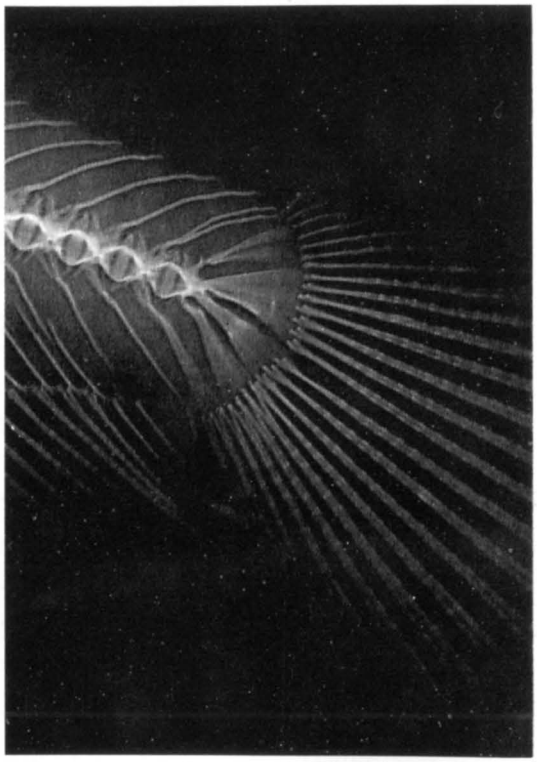

Figure 2. Radiograph of tail portion of *Heteropneustes fossilis* from Attidiya-Bellanwila (Western Province) Sri Lanka, 117.4 mm SL, WHT 1324.

ment that *H. microps* (which they diagnosed correctly) '... is esteemed as food fish for its invigorating qualities. In Bihar tanks are frequently stocked with this fish during the rainy season', however, is mystifying.

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