

**RECORD OF A RARE STINGRAY, *HIMANTURA JENKINSII* (ANNANDALE)
(PISCES: DASYPATIDAE) IN THE ANDAMAN SEA**

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A B S T R A C T

Himantura jenkinsii (Annandale, 1909) is recorded for the first time from off the Andaman coast of Thailand. It appears to be the third known specimen of the species since the original description, which was based on two larger fishes collected off Ganjam, India. This Thai specimen represents a considerable eastward range extension from the type locality in the Bengal Bay.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The present article arises from the sighting of a steamed specimen of an unfamiliar stingray in a hotel in Bangkok, on 25 December 1987. The condition of the fish was surprisingly perfect and it was obvious that it had been prepared for food. My interest was aroused by the peculiar arrangement of tubercle scales on mid-back of body and tail. Unfortunately, the whole fish was not purchasable, but I was able to take its 79 cm whip-like tail.

The size and sex of the fish were not recorded when seen but it was approximately 45 cm in width. Its body outline was similar to *Himantura gerrardi* (Gray) or *H. uarnak* (Forsskål). Except for the absence of any markings on the lower margin of the fish, no other details of that side could be observed.

Although the place of capture of the fish was not known it is likely that it was taken from the Andaman Sea, off the coast of Thailand. This is evidently supported by the type locality of the fish, identified later as *Himantura jenkinsii*, which is located in the Bengal Bay. This conclusion is also based on my experience of seeing no specimen of the species during about 600 trawling hours at depths of 10 to 44 m throughout the Gulf of Thailand, and off the east coast of the Malay Peninsula in 1966 and 1967 (WONGRATANA, 1968). The finding of this specimen is extraordinary because no specimen from the Gulf of Thailand or the Andaman Sea has been collected by me for the fish reference collection of the Marine Fisheries Laboratory, Department of Fisheries, Bangkok (BANASOPIT & WONGRATANA, 1967). Subsequent collections (WONGRATANA, 1982, 1987) have also failed to record it until now.

The present specimen has been placed in the Chulalongkorn University Museum of Zoology, Bangkok (catalogue number CUMZ 2531. 6.3.1).

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TAXONOMIC DISCUSSION

(Figures 1 – 2)

The original description of *Trygon jenkinsii* Annandale (1909) was based on two specimens of similar size, 103.75 cm across disc, taken from the Ganjam coast, Bengal Bay, India, at 23 – 27 fathoms. Since then there has been no substantiated record for the species, and few pertinent references to the species have been made. Its taxonomic status has thus remained obscure for more than 70 years. GARMAN (1913) and FOWLER (1941) included the species in their works from Annandale's detailed description, but they treated it as a member of *Dasybatus* and *Dasyatis*, respectively. Without giving any reason they tentatively considered it as a possible variety of their *D. uarnak*. According to COMPAGNO & HEEMSTRA (1984), the description of *Dasyatus jenkinsii* from Kenya by MORROW (1954) could be based on *jenkinsii*, or their new species *Himantura draco*. WALLACE's (1967) account of *Dasyatus jenkinsii* was based, at least in part, on *Himantura gerrardi*. COMPAGNO & HEEMSTRA (1984) recognized Annandale's species as valid, but placed it in the genus *Himantura*. In that paper they described their new species *Himantura draco* from a single immature male fish of 56 cm disc width, and cited *H. jenkinsii* as its possible closest relative.

Zoogeographically, despite the lack of new specimens of *Himantura jenkinsii*, FOWLER (1941) arbitrarily included Annandale's species in his "Contributions to the biology of the Philippine archipelago and adjacent regions." COMPAGNO & HEEMSTRA (1984) and HEEMSTRA (*in litt.*, 22 July 1988) indicated that this fish possibly occurs in the Gulf of Thailand, based on the sighting of specimens by L.J.V. Compagno in the collection of the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco.

According to COMPAGNO & ROBERTS (1982) and COMPAGNO & HEEMSTRA (1984) the genus *Himantura* Müller & Henle, which contains many marine and freshwater stingrays, is mainly distinguishable from other genera of the Dasyatidae in having "... a long, slender tail without tail folds. Snout angular or broadly rounded, its tip variably developed; teeth small, rhomboidal, thin-crowned; disc oval or diamond-shaped, its dorsal surface with small flat or prickle-like denticles but without large, sharp, spinelike denticles; pectoral fins rounded or angular; pelvic bar highly arched." In all these characters the specimen reported here clearly belongs to a species of *Himantura*.

In view of total agreement between Annandale's good description and figures of his *Trygon jenkinsii* and my specimen, in the absence of upper and lower caudal fin-folds, the arrangement of denticles on tail and mid-back of body, the presence of a caudal spine, the relatively short whip-like tail which is somewhat round in cross-section, the overall morphology of the body and fins, and the absence of markings on the upper and lower surface of the body and tail. I conclude that it is conspecific with that species.

More to the above, COMPAGNO & HEEMSTRA (1984) closely related their new species *Himantura draco* with *H. jenkinsii* in "... its continuous mid-dorsal row of

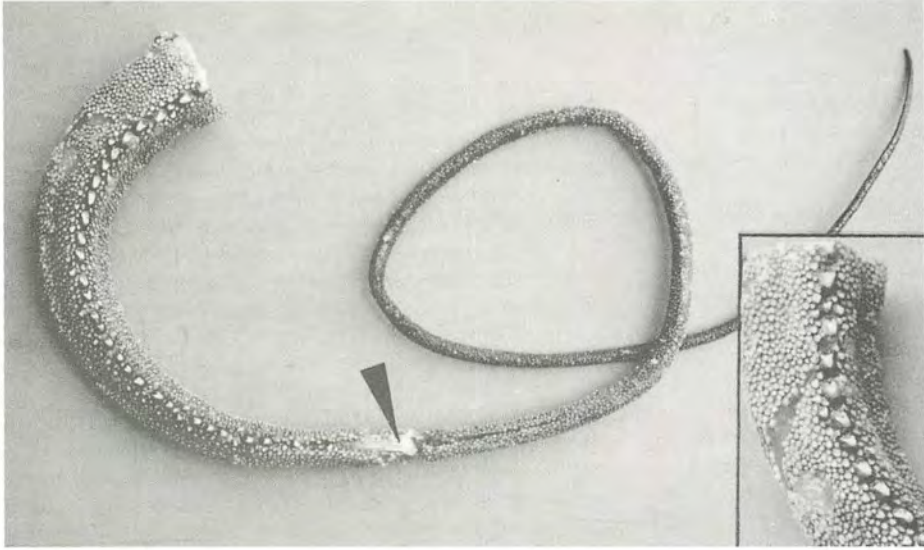


Figure 1. Top view photograph of the whip-like tail, 79.0 cm in length, of *Himantura jenkinsii* (Annandale), from the Andaman Sea, CUMZ 2531.6.3.1; the free tip of caudal spine (arrow) was removed by the fisherman. Inset: Enlargement to show denticles at base of the tail.

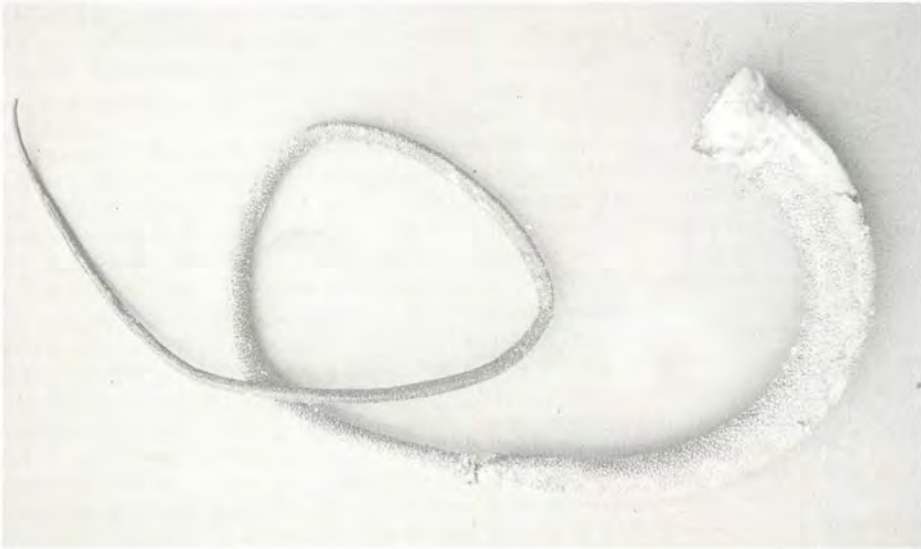


Figure 2. Ventral view photograph of the whip-like tail of the same specimen of Figure 1.

enlarged, hooked denticles. *H. draco* differs from *H. jenkinsii* in its coloration (disc and pelvic fins plain above and white below in *H. jenkinsii*, disc with spotted posterior margins above and disc and pelvic fins with brown posterior margins below in *H. draco*)." From these accounts my species could be proved without question to be *H. jenkinsii*.

With its whip-like tail of 79 cm in extreme length and approximate body width of 45 cm, the smaller Thai specimen had a proportionally longer tail than the two type materials of the species; both of which have similar 103.75 cm disc width and tail lengths of 110.0 and 112.5 cm. This is possibly explainable by the ontogenetic changes of the fishes. It is likely that smaller specimens have relatively longer tails than larger ones.

This collection of the fish is interesting taxonomically and zoogeographically because it constitutes the first record of the species for Thailand, being the second known instance of the species since the record of two specimens named by ANNANDALE (1909). Because of its rarity, more specimens of *Himantura jenkinsii* are required for further biological studies.

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