

A NEW RECORD OF FANTAIL RAY *TAENIURA MELANOSPILA* (BLEEKER, 1853)

## ABSTRACT

Four fantail ray *Taeniura melanospila* (Bleeker, 1853) measuring between 950 mm and 1800 mm across the disc were recorded at Madras for the first time from the coastal waters of the Indian subcontinent. A detailed description of the ray and morphometric measurements are given in the text.

THE FANTAIL RAY *Taeniura melanospila* (Bleeker, 1853), has a distribution from East Africa, Madagascar and Red Sea to the East Indies. It is not so far recorded from the Indian waters. A female specimen, 950 mm across the disc was first recorded at Madras on 24, April 1986 from the catches of mechanised fishing trawlers. Subsequently another specimen, a male measuring 1330 mm, was recorded from the hooks and line catch at the same place on 23-3-1987. Two more specimens, a male and a female, were observed on 16, April 1987 from the trawl catch of the same centre and they measured 1080 mm and 1800 mm respectively. This account is of interest to science as such information is reported for the first time in Indian waters.

This species has a nearly circular disc. The dorsal side is bluish-grey mottled with a very large number of irregularly arranged dark

spots and blotches (Pl. I). The ventral side is creamy white in colour.

*Taeniura melanospila* (Bleeker, 1853) (Pl. I)

*Taeniura melanospilos* Bleeker 1853 : 513 (Batavia).

*Taeniura melanospila* : Smith 1952 a : 15 (fig.) ; 1952 b : 1020, pl. 38 ; 1955 : 5 ; 1961 : 513, fig. 78 a.

Thorpe 1964 : 27 (fig). Wallace 1967 : 28, fig. 13.

Snout with a very small apical projection. Disc almost circular 1.13 times wider than long. Eyes small with protective horny cover. Spiracles dorso-laterally situated, larger than eyes. A row of tubercles above branchial lines from the shoulder regions towards the outer edge of the disc and another as a median line above the vertebral column. Each tubercle has a circular base and a sharp conical point. Tail stout, relatively short, 0.9 times the length of disc (Table 1), with a sharp

TABLE 1. Major morphometric measurements (in mm) of four numbers of *Taeniura melanospila*

| Characters                   | 1      | 2     | 3      | 4     |
|------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| Disc width                   | 950    | 1,330 | 1,800  | 1,080 |
| length                       | 840    | 1,180 | 1,540  | 960   |
| Tail length                  | 770    | 1,100 | 1,380  | 970   |
| Snout to tail tip            | 1,610  | 2,210 | 2,720  | 1,840 |
| „ anterior end of orbit      | 178    | 240   | 270    | 200   |
| „ lower jaw                  | 183    | 220   | 190    | 175   |
| „ anterior end of cloaca     | 709    | 980   | 1,080  | 800   |
| Width of mouth               | 86     | 110   | 75     | 70    |
| Distance between orbits      | 85     | 240   | 320    | 180   |
| „ „ spiracles                | 174    | 220   | 220    | 195   |
| „ „ inner ends of nostrils   | 149    | 156   | 130    | 120   |
| „ „ First pair of gill slits | 220    | 300   | 235    | 230   |
| „ „ fifth pair of gill slits | 142    | 200   | 150    | 150   |
| Length of claspers           | —      | 350   | —      | 200   |
| Sex                          | female | male  | female | male  |

serrated spine near its mid point. A black ventral cutaneous fold from below the anterior end of the spine to the tip of the tail.

The dorsal surface of the disc, fins and tail is covered with small stellate spinules which make it rough to the touch. Four large papille on the floor of the mouth; teeth in <sup>36-45</sup><sub>39-45</sub> transverse rows.

#### Remarks

This ray was first recorded in 1853 in Batavia. Even though its occurrence was recorded from

East Africa to East Indies, there is no authentic record available from the Indian Coast. Day (1878) had only expressed the possibility of its occurrence in our coastal waters. Fowler (1941) who had given a descriptive account of the sharks, skates and rays had not mentioned anything about the occurrence of this ray in Indian Coast.

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