

ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE SACRED CHANK, *XANCUS PYRUM*  
(LINNAEUS) OFF PORTO NOVO

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The sacred chank, *Xancus pyrum* (Linnaeus) is an important gastropod exploited commercially in a few maritime states in India; the major portion is from Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay. Nayar and Mahadevan (1973) gave the details of chank resources of India suggesting possibilities of exploiting them from un-fished waters.

During the course of routine observations on fish landings, it was found that considerable number of chanks were landed by the trawlers operating off Porto Novo. The chanks were also entangled in small numbers in the indigenous boat seines locally called *vella valai*, operated from catamaran boats in shallow coastal areas of Tranquebar, Pudupattinam, Sinnangudi, Kaveripatinam, Melamookkarai and Tirumullaivasal. Since the data available from these boat seines were scanty they have not been included in the present account. Observations were made on chanks fished by trawlers during the period July, 1971 to June, 1972. Most of these trawlers operated at depths of 14 to 36 metres, between Tirumullaivasal and Porto Novo. No trawlers operated south of Tirumullaivasal. However, between Tirumullaivasal and Tranquebar chanks are brought in small numbers by the indigenous boats thus showing the presence of chanks in the coastal waters between Tirumullaivasal and Tranquebar also.

The particulars of chanks landed at Porto Novo between July, 1971 and June, 1972 are shown in Table 1. The total number of chanks landed per day during the period of observations along with the particulars of full size, undersize and wormed chanks were gathered from the boats landing them and also from the local merchants who purchase the chanks. Since the trawlers were operating throughout the month, the estimated total chanks landed during each month were calculated from the number of chanks landed during the observation days.

An estimated number of 1,01,117 chanks were landed during the entire period of observation. The estimated number of chanks caught in a month varied from 315 in January to 53,635 in May. During the rest of the months the number of chanks brought were negligible. But from February onwards there was appreciable increase in the landings upto May when the maximum numbers were recorded. In June the landings were moderate.

TABLE 1. *Particulars of chank landings at Porto Novo from July 1971 to June 1972.*

Months	Number of observation days	Number of chanks landed			Total number of chanks	Depth at which trawlers operated (metres)	Estimated number of chanks
		sized	undersized	wormed			
1971							
July	6	218	117	140	475	12-20	2375
August	6	93	82	75	250	10-18	1250
September	12	414	166	171	751	9-32	1878
October	10	192	131	93	416	16-27	1248
November	8	78	42	17	137	14-18	514
December	10	151	105	52	308	14-34	924
1972							
January	6	34	14	15	63	16-18	315
February	6	122	73	46	241	16-22	1205
March	6	322	130	93	545	18-36	2725
April	5	2094	942	424	3460	27-36	20742
May	6	6422	3844	661	10927	31-36	53,635
June	7	1800	1204	334	3338	16-27	14306

All the chanks obtained by the mechanised boats were kept in heaps at the landing centre and sold by auction without allowing the bidders to examine the chanks in the heap. The quality of the chanks available along this coast is referred to as 'Patti' by the local merchants. Hornell (1915) has indicated the variety of chanks available in the coastal districts of the Madras State and the 'Patti' variety referred is not comparable to the 'Jathi' variety of chanks fished off Tuticorin for its perfect shape.

According to Moses (1923) the greatest depth at which the chanks were taken was about 20 metres. Mahadevan and Nayar (1966) on making the underwater observations off Tuticorin noticed the presence of chanks in the shoreward areas between 10-12 metres. In the light of this, it was interesting to observe in the present case, the netting of chanks in stray numbers in the catches of indigenous boat seines operating in the shallow coastal waters having a depth of 8-10 metres. The landing centres situated between Porto Novo and Tranquebar comprise parts of two districts of Tamilnadu viz. South Arcot and Tanjore. Hornell (1914) and recently Rao (1969) have reported the presence of chank beds in these two districts.

From the data gathered during the present work, it was found that the number of undersized chanks in the catches was alarmingly high. The boat crew never discard the undersized chanks but sell them with other chanks. For the conservation of this valuable gastropod, restrictions on fishing chanks below a particular size appears to be necessary.

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