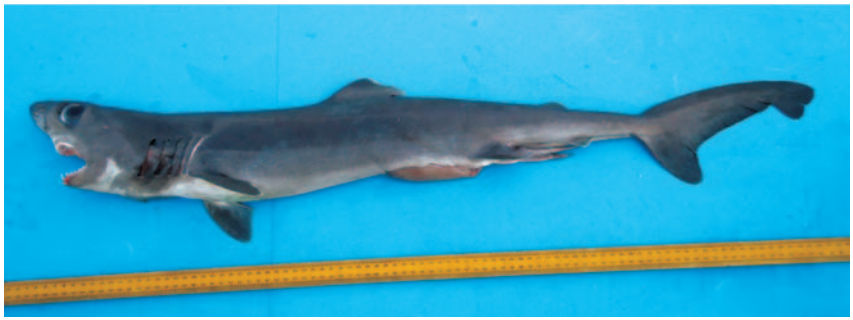
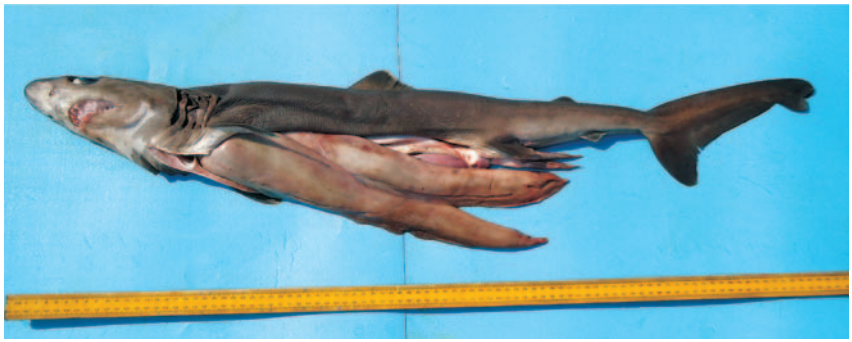
First record of the crocodile shark in deep sea trawl landings at Chennai

A single specimen of the crocodile shark *Pseudocarcharias kamoharai* (Matsubara, 1936) was collected from the deep sea trawl landings at Chennai Fisheries Harbour on 10.02.2011. The species is the only representative of the family Pseudocarchariidae and is the smallest known living mackerel shark (Order: Lamniformes). Known to be circumtropical in distribution, with its range extending from Eastern Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, its occurrence in the Indian Ocean has been reported from the Mozambique Channel, southwest of southern Madagascar while its distribution in the Bay of Bengal has been reported as doubtful. However, it has been reported to occur as by-catch in Japanese yellowfin tuna longline fishery and Australian swordfish fishery, both in the Indian Ocean. There is no known fishery for the species and it does not find much commercial significance on account of its rare abundance in well-exploited fishing grounds, small-size and low quality of meat. The large liver is known to be rich in squalene and is of potential value.



Pseudocarcharias kamoharai landed by a deep sea trawler



A dissected view of the shark showing the large liver inside the body cavity

The species is characterized by a long body, small fins, huge eyes without a nictitating membrane, long gill slits, angular mouth with protrusible jaws housing long-cusped prominent teeth, weak keels and precaudal pits on the caudal peduncle and an asymmetrical caudal fin with a long ventral lobe.

The specimen obtained was an adult male, of 91 cm total length and 2.2 kg weight. The liver, measuring 42 cm in length, weighed 0.5 kg.

Catch records of *P. kamoharai* are confined to less than 50 specimens deposited in museums. No data is available on the population status of this species and its abundance has been reported only in the Mozambique Channel in the Western Indian Ocean in the 1960s (Compagno 2001). A probable decline due to bycatch mortality and low reproductive rate has led the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to assess this species as near threatened.

(Reported by Shobha Joe Kizhakudan, Chennai RC)