

**NOTE ON THE HABITAT AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE FILE-FISH
ALONG THE TUTICORIN COAST**

Venkataraman and George (1964)* have drawn our attention to the distribution of file-fish along the South-west coast of India. In this connection it may be of interest to know about the habitat and distribution of balistids in the Gulf of Mannar from Manapad to Vaipaar within the area bound by Lat. 8°20'N.-9°0'N. and Long. 78°10'E.-78°25'E. from 10-30 metre depth zone.

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Direct underwater observations carried out by the authors over this area have shown that *Abalistes stellaris* (Bloch), *Sufflamen capistratus* (Shaw), *Balistoides viridescens* (Bloch) and *Odonus niger* (Rüppell) are very characteristic of the rocky bottom. These fishes occur in between depth ranges of 12-30 metres. They are not found over sandy stretches or over muddy areas. Numerically the first two species are more abundant. Of the last two *B. viridescens* is rarer and is found in rocky areas where dense sea-weed growth (especially *Sargassum* spp.) is encountered. *Odonus niger*, wherever they occurred, did so in considerable numbers. They have a tendency to swim fairly high above the sea-bottom (2-4 metres above) and do not try to enter the crevices when chased as in the case of *Abalistes stellaris* or *Sufflamen capistratus*. Another interesting feature about *Odonus niger* is that they are more frequently seen in areas where live corals existed.

Balistids are found in greater numbers in the deeper zones than along the shoreward waters (below 14 metres depth). Also their population is more in the rocky beds off Tiruchendur and further south. These fishes are landed in negligible quantities locally and elsewhere along this coast, chiefly by a few fishermen who are engaged in hand-line fishing in shallow waters with no. 10 hooks. During the chank diving season, viz. November-May the fishermen engaged as 'Munduks' (helpers) for the divers utilize their spare time in catching the file-fish. The file-fish find favour with the very poor fisher-folk only and is not eaten by others. But no ill effect is seen by eating these fishes and they are considered here as non-poisonous.

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