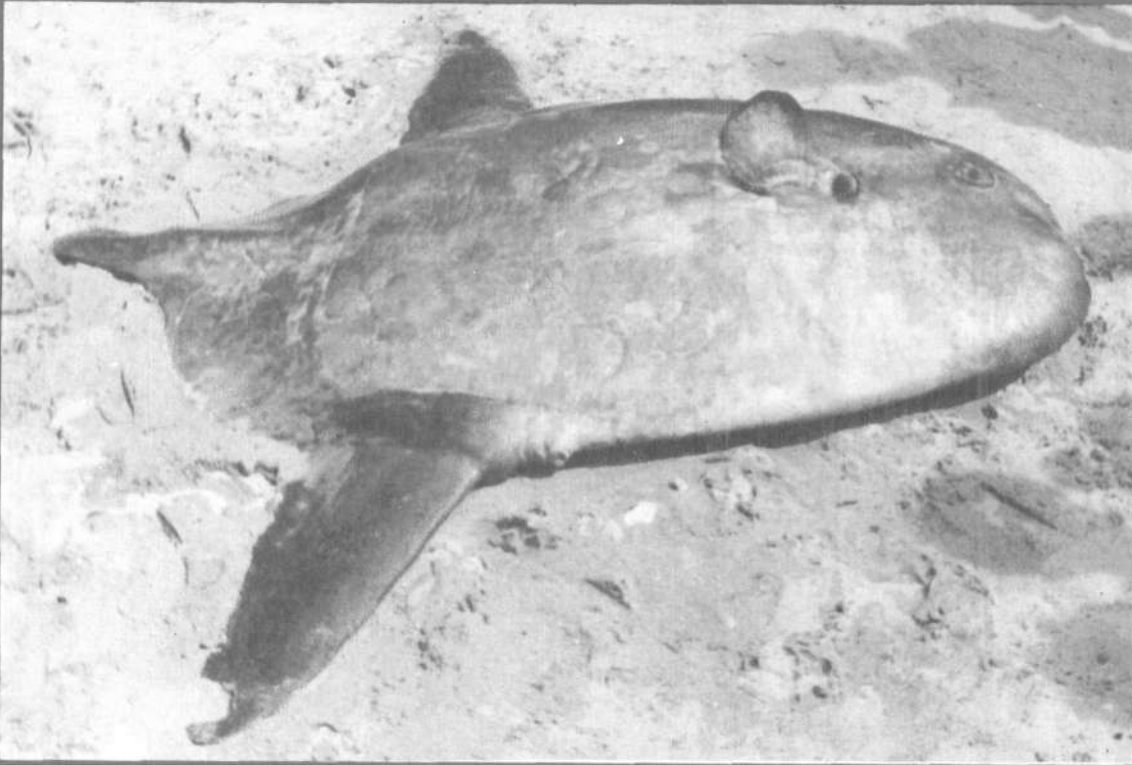




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INDIAN COUNCIL OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

ON THE LARGEST SUN FISH EVER CAUGHT FROM THE INDIAN SEAS*

Ocean sun fishes (Family-Molidae) are well known for their grotesque rounded bodies and gigantic size. The genera *Ranzania*, *Masturus* and *Mola* have been recorded from Indian waters (Table-1).

A male sun fish *Masturus lanceolatus* Leonard measuring 1535 mm total length and a maximum depth of 815 mm (Fig. 1) was caught at a depth of 60-90 m in the drift gill net (*Paruvalai*) operated off Tuticorin on 24-8-1993. This is the second record of this species from Indian coast and first record from Gulf of Mannar and also the largest size of sun fish ever recorded from Indian waters.

Body more or less oval and laterally compressed. Skin with small rough denticles. The snout is rounded, teeth in each jaw are fused into a single element. The finfolds of dorsal, anal and caudal fins are continuous. The caudal fin gradually tapering and forms pointed tail which is the charactersitic of this genus. The pelvic fins are absent. Pectorals are comparatively small in



Fig. 1. The largest sunfish *Masturus lanceolatus* Leonard landed at Tuticorin on 24.8.1993.

size. The colour of the fish is dark grey on the back and silvery white on the abdomen. The fins are dark grey. Wide dark patches are present at the base of the dorsal and a circular band at the

TABLE 1. Details of records of Sun fishes made by different workers at different places along the Indian coast from 1953 to 1993

Name of person	Year of record	Species	Region	Total length (mm)	References	Remarks
Kulkarni, C. V.	1953	<i>Masturus lanceolatus</i>	Bombay waters	925	<i>J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.</i> , 51(4):948-950	First record of any kind of Sun fish from Indian water
Chacko and Mathew	1956	<i>Ranzania truncata</i>	Malabar coast near Beypore	610	<i>J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.</i> , 53 (4):724-725	First record of this species
Chapgar, B. F.	1964	<i>Ranzania truncata</i>	Sassoon Dock, Bombay city	571	<i>J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.</i> , 61 (2): 453-456	—
Pradhan, M. J.	1965	<i>Ranzania truncata</i>	Bombay waters	—	<i>J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.</i> , 62 (1) : 163-164	—
Mohamed Zafarkhan	1975	<i>Mola mola</i>	Off Satpatti, Bombay	1240	<i>Indian. J. Fish.</i> , 22 (1,2) : 295-296	First record of this species
Devaraj, M. et al.	1976	<i>Masturus oxyropterus</i>	Gulf of Mannar	880	<i>J. mar. biol. Ass. India</i> , 18 (3) : 664-665	First record of this species
Ebenezer I. P. and J. Jerold Joel	1984	<i>Ranzania typus</i>	Kanyakumari	616	<i>Indian J. Fish.</i> , 31 (3) : 360-361	First record of this species
Present record	1994	<i>Masturus lanceolatus</i>	Off Tuticorin, Gulf of Mannar	1535	<i>Mar. Fish. Infor. Serv., T & E Ser.</i> , No. 128	Record of largest size of Sun fish ever landed

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base of the caudal, Base of dorsal lobe (240 mm) is longer than the base of anal fin (210 mm) which clearly differentiates this species from its allied species *Masturus oxyuropterus* (Bleeker) in which the bases of dorsal and anal lobes are almost equal. Morphometric measurements are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Morphometric measurements (mm) of Sun fish *Masturus lanceolatus* from Tuticorin Gulf of Mannar

Total length	-	1535
Standard length	-	1265
Snout length	-	175
Head length	-	425
Eye diameter vertical	-	60
Eye diameter horizontal	-	60
Eye ball diameter	-	30
Inter orbital distance	-	219
Snout to insertion of dorsal fin	-	860
Snout to insertion of anal fin	-	850
Snout to anus	-	820
Snout to insertion of pectoral fin	-	375
Dorsal to tip of clavus	-	560

Breadth at head region	-	730
Breadth at middle region	-	815
Length of mouth	-	75
Breadth of mouth	-	90
Length of gill opening	-	62
Height of dorsal fin	-	535
Base of dorsal fin	-	240
Height of anal fin	-	525
Base of anal fin	-	210
Pectoral length	-	165
Pectoral breadth	-	140
Length of posterior projection	-	265
Breadth of posterior projection	-	195
Weight (approximate)	-	62 kg.
Sex	-	Male

These fishes float or swim in the surface and are harmless. The fish could not be sold since it is considered as unpalatable. When the fish was cut open the flesh was crystal white and almost spongy and emitted a pungent odour. The stomach was empty.