

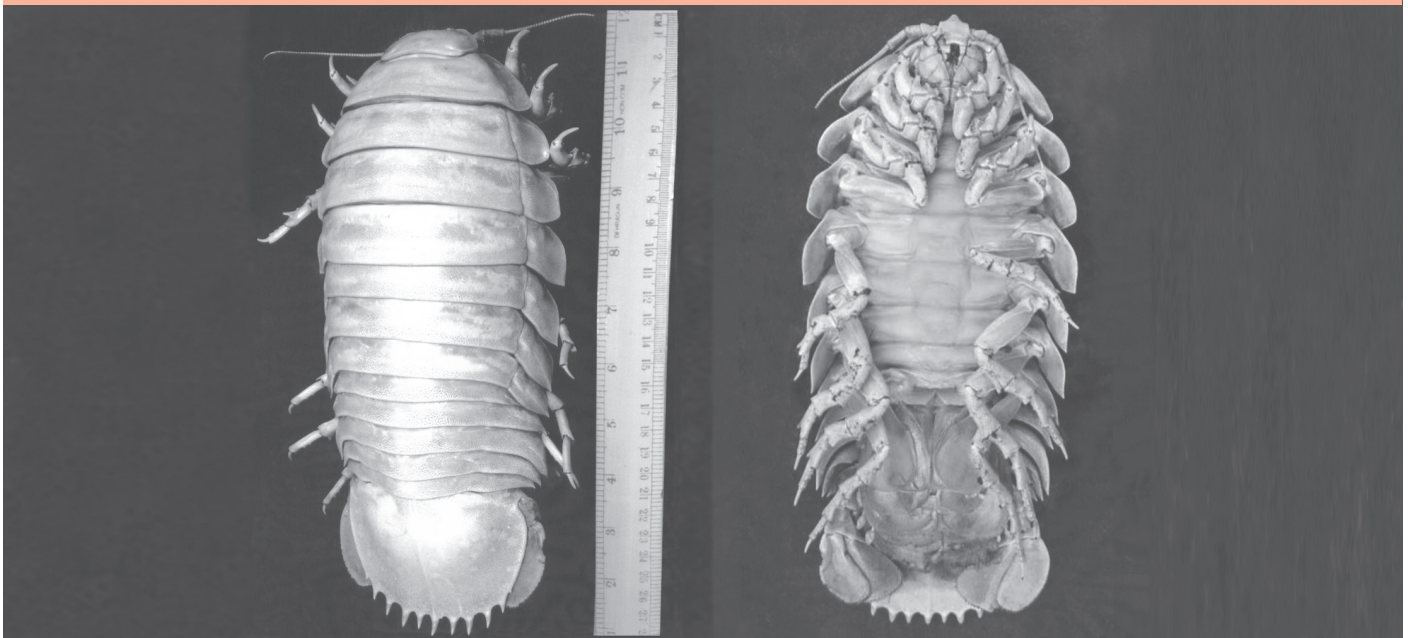
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Protoreaster lincki, commonly called red general star or red spined star is a beautiful, decorative species, which is relatively larger in size up to 30 cm, with five short triangular arms having bright red or orange reticulate pattern on the dorsal side.



Fig. 1. Drying of *Protoreaster lincki*

Distributed throughout the Indo-Pacific region as a sand or sea grass bed dweller, this species is never encountered in intertidal areas. It is considered as a voracious scavenger, mainly feed on sponges, sea anemones, soft corals etc. It is an enemy of pearl oysters along the Gulf of Mannar area. This species attracted the attention

of aquarium keepers because of its bold shape and bright colours.

At Tuticorin, this species is being collected and processed in huge quantities, mainly for ornamental purpose and also for curios along Kalavasal area. It is informed that these are mainly collected by the skin divers engaged in chank fishing during off-season and sells at a cost of Rs.1 - 1.50/- per piece depending on the size. After collection, the specimens are washed thoroughly in seawater to remove adhering sand and other extraneous particle and sun dried (Fig.1). Some traders are giving formic acid treatment before drying to avoid off odor, while storage and also to retain the colour and beauty for long time. The dried starfish is procured by the vendors from Kanyakumari, Rameswaram, Keezhakarai and Chennai at Rs.2-3/- per piece. Per day an average of 200-300 pieces are being collected during peak season and is considered as cheap but

profitable business.

Like other echinoderms, starfishes constitute a major marine benthic community having significant impacts on community structure. At present starfishes are not included in the list of threatened fauna. So far no stock assessment has been carried out to study the abundance of the

species along Gulf Mannar area. The possibility of over exploitation of this species along with its habitat destruction by coral mining warrants the initiation of conservation measures and also to study its impacts on ecosystem.

Prepared by: P.S. Asha and K. Diwakar,
Tuticorin Research Centre of CMFRI,
Tuticorin