

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTE

### 16. *HETEROPNEUSTES FOSSILIS* (BLOCH), A NEW ADDITION TO THE FRESHWATER FISH FAUNA OF THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS<sup>1</sup>

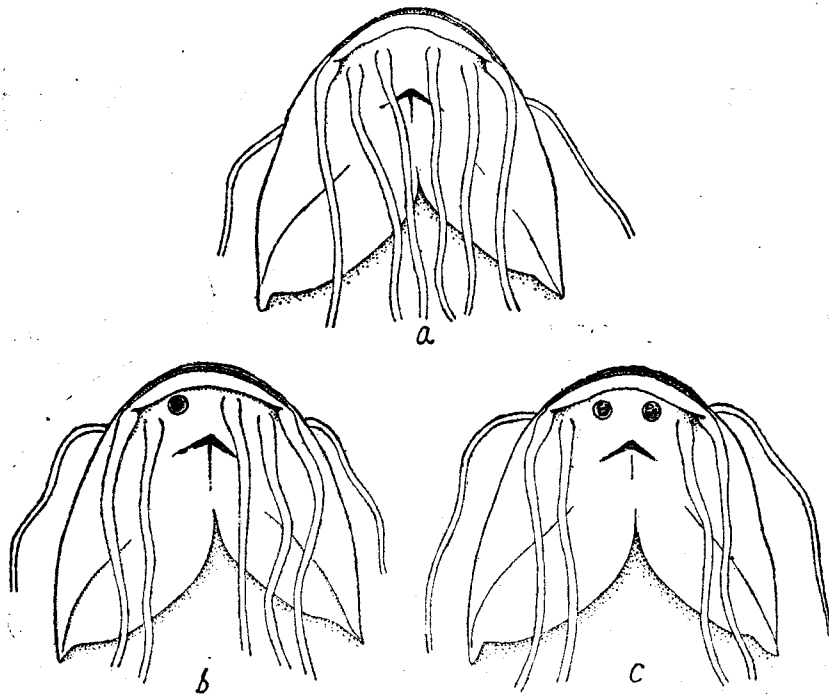
(With one text-figure)

During a recent visit to the Andaman Islands in February-March 1960, we were able to collect, besides other species, 8 specimens of the catfish *Heteropneustes fossilis* (Bloch) measuring from 99 to 245 mm. in standard length from a stream near the forest rest camp about seven miles (c. 11 km.) from Mayabundur, Middle Andamans. Subsequently, ten more specimens of the same species were obtained by us from a local resident of Port Blair, South Andamans, who had collected them from a nullah at Farargunj, about six miles (c. 9 km.) from Port Blair. A perusal of the literature shows that Blyth (1858, 1860), Day (1870), Annandale & Hora (1925), Mukerji (1935), Hora & Rao (1938), and Herre (1939, 1941), who have all reported on the fishes of the Andaman waters, have not recorded this species from there. The freshwater fish fauna of the islands has been fairly well studied and it is unlikely that this species could have escaped notice of the above workers. In view of this, we are inclined to believe that *H. fossilis* is a more recent introduction and from its occurrence in streams in both Middle and South Andamans, it would appear that the species is well established in these islands.

We were interested to find four of the ten specimens from Farargunj showing abnormality as regards the number of barbels. The normal complement of barbels for this species is four pairs, one nasal, one maxillary and two mandibular pairs. In three of the aforementioned specimens the inner pair of mandibular barbels are totally absent, while in the fourth specimen only one of the inner pair of mandibular barbels is absent (Text-fig. a-c). The position of these missing barbels is indicated by depressions, but there is no indication that the loss is due to external injury. To our knowledge this kind of an abnormality has not been reported for *H. fossilis*, although similar conditions have been noted among some members of the family Siluridae. The fact that all these ten specimens exhibit weak and flexible pectoral spines instead of the strong and well-ossified condition as seen in the specimens collected near Mayabundur, suggests that

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Text-figure *Heteropneustes fossilis* (Bloch): (a) Ventral view of head showing the normal complement of four pairs of barbels; (b) same, with one of the inner pair of mandibular barbels absent; (c) same, with the inner pair of mandibular barbels absent.

these abnormalities may be on account of some localised environmental phenomena rather than being of any genetic significance. In characters, such as the body proportions, dentition, etc., both the samples agree and in order to facilitate comparison with the mainland representatives of the species, the frequency of occurrences of three of the meristic characters of these specimens are given in the accompanying table wherein A- and B- refer to samples from near Mayabundur and Farargunj respectively.

TABLE

ANAL FIN RAYS	
60	61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80
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	DORSAL	FIN	NO. OF GILL-RAKERS ON LOWER LIMB OF OUTER ARCH									
	1,6	1,7	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
A-	1	7	—	—	2	3	1	—	1	—	—	—
B-	10	—	—	2	5	3	—	—	—	—	—	—

Freshly collected specimens, especially the larger ones had a light yellowish tinge all over the body. On preservation this was lost, but the specimens retained the two characteristic lighter bands, one above and one below the midlateral line of the body.

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