

# A new and valuable resource for the Indian Beche-de-mer Industry

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*The sea cucumber species known as Paar Attai (Actinopyga echinites Jaeger) was so far not reported from India. Recently it was processed at Kilakarai, Vedalai and Periapatnam in the Gulf of Mannar. This valuable resource is now being monitored by Dr. D. B. James, Scientist S.G. and Shri M. Bahrudeen, Technical Officer of Tuticorin Research Centre of CMFRI.*

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Although the Indian Beche-de-mer industry is in existence for more than one thousand years the species that is chiefly processed is *Holothuria scabra*

(*Vella Attai*) and to a very minor extent *Holothuria spini-fera* (*Raja Attai* or *Cheena Attai*). In recent years due to the attractive price offered for

Beche-de-mer in the International market, another sea cucumber *Bohadschia marmorata* (*Nool Attai*) is also processed to a minor extent at Kilakarai. India is now earning a foreign exchange of more than one crore rupees by exporting chiefly *Holothuria scabra*.

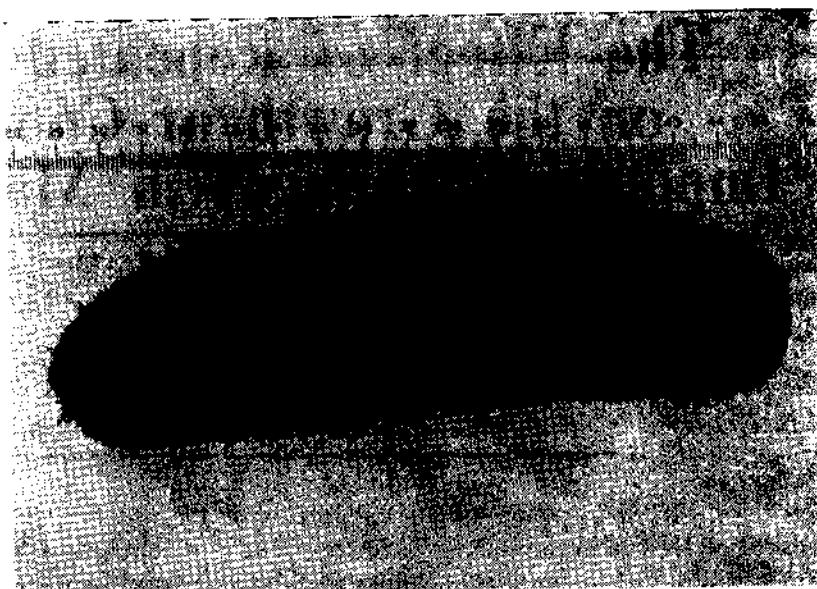
In 1989, for the first time another sea cucumber locally known as *Paar Attai* was processed at Kilakarai and about 10 tonnes of this species was exported. This year the same species is processed from Vedalai, Kilakarai and Periapatnam in the Gulf of Mannar. This species is known as *Paar Attai* since it was found attached to



*A group of Actinopyga echinites Jaeger*

the *Paars* in the Gulf of Mannar. This species has been identified as *Actinopyga echinites* Jaeger commonly known as Deep Water Red Fish. It enjoys a wide distribution and is collected from several places in the Indo-Pacific region. It is also recorded from Sri Lanka but so far not collected from the Indian side since the divers did not visit their natural grounds between 4-6 metres depth earlier. This species is collected from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and also from the Lakshadweep near the shore and it is not processed there at present. Other species of *Actinopyga* are also collected along with *Paar Attai*.

At present this species is collected four to five kilometres beyond Krusadai, Maunali, Hare and other Islands at a depth of 4-6 metres in the Gulf of Mannar. So far more than two lakh specimens have landed at the three landing centres this year. Last year nearly 100 tonnes of this species was processed. At present 12 boats are engaged in fishing for this species. About 15-20 persons go in a boat. They leave in the morning at 6 a.m. and return by 2 p.m. Each specimen is paid Rs. 2.50 to 3/- depending on the size. This year the fishery started for this species in August. Each diver earns Rs. 200/- to Rs. 1000/- per day depending on favourable conditions.



*A close view of Actinopyga echinites*

This species is said to command a better price than *Vella Attai* in the International market. According to a recent report from the Phillipines the *beche-de-mer* of this species is six times costlier than that of *Holothuria scabra*. At present the merchants are purchasing processed material at Rs. 65/- per Kg. The processing method is also different from other

species. In the living condition it is uniformly brown all over. The length of the specimens varies from 130 to 210 mm and the weight varies from 125 to 420 g. Processed material varies in length from 50 to 150 mm and the weight varies from 20 to 120 g. Many of the large specimens were fully mature with ripe eggs.

### **TAGGED CHANKS RECAPTURED AT MANDAPAM**

During August/September 1990, the traditional holothurian divers brought two tagged chanks released from the Mandapam Regional Centre of CMFRI. The chanks (*Xancus pyrum*) bearing code number MR/57 and MR/23 were recovered after 235 and 261 days respectively and they have grown breadth-wise to 14.78 mm and 13.82 mm respectively. During this period, the chanks have migrated about 5 km southeastwards from their site of release. The tagging of chank, *Xancus pyrum* formed a part of PF/IP/5 project.