NEW AUSTRALIAN FISHES. PART 4.
A NEW SPECIES OF *STEENEICHTHYS* (PLESIOPIDAE)

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Abstract

Allen, G. R., 1987. New Australian fishes. Part 4. A new species of *Steeneichthys* (Plesiopidae). *Mem. Mus. Vict.* 48: 13-14.

A new species of plesiopid, *Steeneichthys nativitatis,* is described from Christmas Island, Indian Ocean, on the basis of a single specimen. It is similar to *S. plesiopsus* Allen & Randall from north-western Australia and the western Pacific, but differs in pectoral ray and gill raker counts, and also in coloration.

Introduction

The family Plesiopidae contains abut 20 species in seven genera distributed mainly on Indo-west Pacific coral reefs, although *Trachinops* and *Paraplesiops* Bleeker containing eight species are mostly confined to southern Australian seas. Allen and Randall (1985) described *Steeneichthys plesiopsus* as a new genus and species from north-western Australia, Fiji and Samoa. This paper describes a second species of *Steeneichthys* collected on a recent expedition to Christmas Island. The holotype is deposited at the Western Australian Museum, Perth (WAM).

Steeneichthys nativiatis sp. nov.

Figure 1

Material examined. Holotype: Christmas Island, Indian Ocean, near Smith Point (10°26'S, 105°40'E), 30-40 m, rotenone, G. Allen and R. Steene, 6 Jul 1986, WAM P29016-001 (24.5 mm SL).

Description. Dorsal fin rays IX, 9; anal fin rays III, 7; pelvic fin rays I, 4; pectoral fin rays 16; total gill rakers on first arch 12; scale rows from origin of lateral line to base of caudal fin about 24 (many scales missing); a single lateral-line scale with sensory tubule above upper edge of operculum; transverse scale series counted forward and upward from the second anal spine 9.

Measurements in mm (percent of standard length in parentheses): standard length 24.5; head length 9.5 (39); snout length 1.7 (7); maxilla length 4.0 (16); eye diameter 3.1 (13); body depth at first dorsal spine 9.0 (37); predorsal length 9.5 (39); preanal length 16.7 (68); least depth of caudal peduncle 4.2 (17); pectoral fin length 5.0 (20); pelvic fin length 8.6 (35); length of dorsal fin base 12.0 (49); length of anal fin base 5.0 (20).

Colour when fresh: overall brown, centre of each scale darker forming series of dark brown stripes on side; dorsal, caudal, anal, and pelvic fins dark brown, all except pelvics with white margin, widest on dorsal fin; pectoral clear with brown edged rays.

Colour in alcohol: similar to live colouration after three months in preservative although there are large whitish areas on the head and body due to missing scales.

Distribution. Christmas Island, Indian Ocean.

Etymology. From *nativitas* (Latin) the nativity, referring to the type locality of Christmas Island.

Remarks. This species is similar to *Steeneichthys plesiopsus* Allen & Randall but differs by having 16 pectoral rays and 12 gill rakers on the first arch (17-18 and 10-11 respectively in *S. plesiopsus*). Furthermore, there are distinct colour differences between these species: *S. plesiopsus* has faint vertical bars on the head and body, *S. nativitatis* has narrow horizonal stripes; the dorsal, caudal, and anal fins have prominent light and dark bands in *P. plesiopsus* and are uniform brown in *P. nativiatis*.
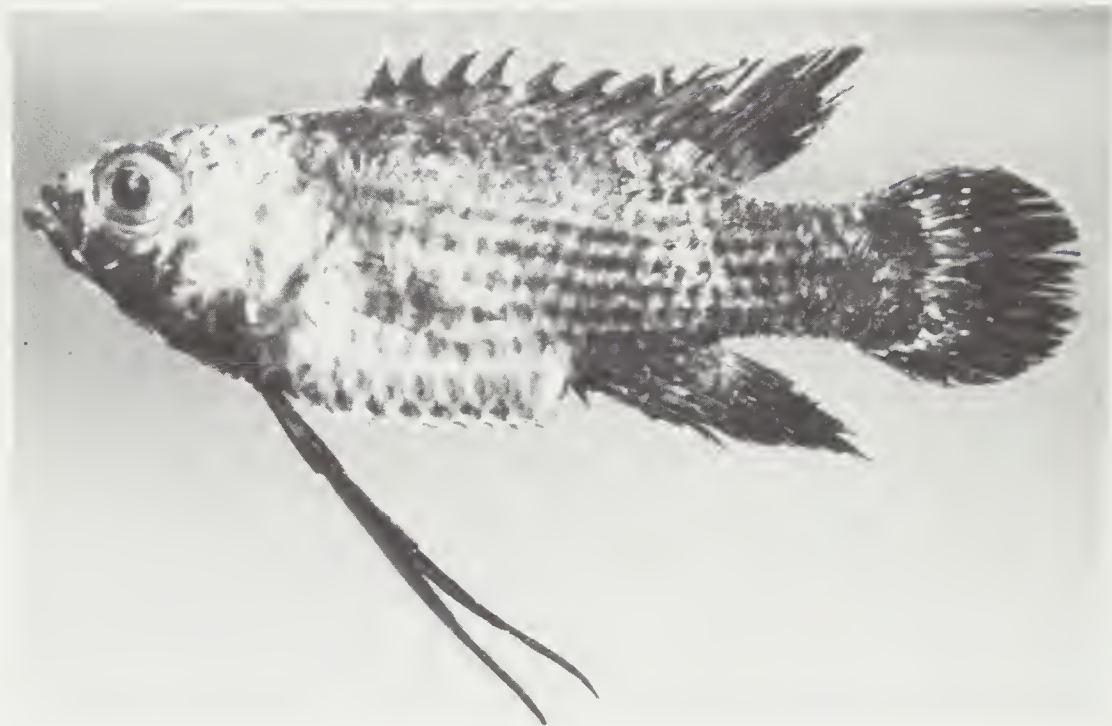
Figure 1. *Steeneichthys nativitatis,* holotype WAM P29016-001, 24.5 mm SL, Christmas Island.

The holotype was collected in 30-40 m amongst rubble at the base of a vertical cliff that began in 6 m depth. It is likely that this species will be found at other Indian Ocean localities and may prove to be an allopatric "geminate" relative of the western Pacific (and Western Australia) *S. plesiopsus.* Because of their small size and cryptic, deep-dwelling habits these fishes are seldom collected.

Reference

Allen, G.G. and Randall, J.E. 1985. A new genus and species of plesiopid fish from Western Australia and the central-south Pacific Ocean. *Rec. West. Aust. Mus.* 12(2): 185-191.