

## *Ophichthys desilvai*, a poorly known synbranchid eel from Sri Lanka (Teleostei: Synbranchidae)

**Ralf Britz\***, **Hiranya Sudasinghe\*\***, **Dan Sykes\*\*\*** and **R. H. Tharindu Ranasinghe\*\*\*\***

The endemic Sri Lankan synbranchid '*Monopterus*' *desilvai* is redescribed based on additional material. In life, individuals have a maroon background colour with numerous dark brown blotches. They breathe air, which is stored in paired suprabranchial pouches. The head skeleton of *M. desilvai* is described in detail. This species shares with *M. cuchia*, *M. indicus*, *M. fossorius*, *M. ichthyophoides*, *M. rongsaw*, *M. luticolus*, and *M. boueti* derived and unique modifications of the gill arch skeleton: ceratobranchial 1 is spatially removed from hypobranchial 1 and aligned with hypo- and ceratobranchial 2, leading to a separation of the anterior from the posterior gill arch skeleton. It shares with *M. cuchia*, *M. indicus*, *M. fossorius*, and *M. ichthyophoides* an even further derived gill arch skeleton, in which epibranchial 1, the interarcual bone and pharyngobranchial 2 are absent, modifications putatively related to the evolution of paired suprabranchial pouches in these species. Based on these shared derived characters the group comprising *M. cuchia*, *M. indicus*, *M. fossorius*, *M. ichthyophoides* and *M. desilvai*, is recognized as a monophyletic unit for which the oldest available generic name is *Ophichthys* Swainson.

### Introduction

Swamp eels of the family Synbranchidae are greatly elongate, eel-like percomorphs distributed in large areas of South and Central America, West Africa, most of mainland Asia and the Indo-Australian Archipelago, as well as northern Australia (Berra, 2007). Two Asian species have become invasive in the USA (Collins et al., 2002; Nico et al., 2019).

Synbranchids have been known to the scientific world for more than 200 years but new species are still being discovered (see Britz et al., 2011, 2016, 2018). These fishes are unusual in that while adults lack rays or fin supports (pectoral radials, pterygiophores, and hypurals), larvae and small juveniles may have large pectoral fins supported by large, cartilaginous, pectoral radial plates, and well supplied with blood vessels, which aid in supplementing respiration (Taylor, 1913; Wu &

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\* Museum für Tierkunde, Senckenberg Naturhistorische Sammlungen Dresden, Germany; and Department of Life Sciences, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, United Kingdom.

E-mail: [ralf.britz@senckenberg.de](mailto:ralf.britz@senckenberg.de)

\*\* Postgraduate Institute of Science, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

\*\*\* Henry Moseley X-ray Imaging Facility, Alan Turing Building, The University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom.

\*\*\*\* Department of Zoology, Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

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