

ON THE TYPE SPECIMENS OF *AMBASSIS NOTATUS* BLYTH, 1861
(PISCES : AMBASSIDAE), WITH A REDESCRIPTION
OF THE SPECIES

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ABSTRACT

The rediscovery of the unique syntypes of *Ambassis notatus* Blyth, 1861, belonging to the family Ambassidae, in the collections of the Zoological Survey of India, is announced. Consequent to this discovery, the inadequate original description is expanded, and a lectotype is selected for the species and illustrated.

INTRODUCTION

New information about *Ambassis notatus* Blyth, 1861, is desirable since this fish has been rather rarely noted in the ichthyological literature. Blyth's (1861) original description based on specimens from Burma, is brief and most inadequate for specific determination, and further the species is not illustrated. Subsequent to its original discovery, Day (1869, 1875 ; Menon, 1974) considered it conspecific with *Ambassis baculis* (Hamilton—Buchanan, 1822) but later Day (1888) relegated it to the synonymy of *Ambassis ranga* (Hamilton—Buchanan, 1822). Fraser—Brunner (1954), however, resurrected *A. notatus* from the synonymy of *Chanda baculis* Hamilton-Buchanan, based on an examination of two of Day's specimens from Moulmein (Burma) in the repository of the British Museum (Natural History).

In the present communication the rediscovery of the type-specimens of *Ambassis notatus* Blyth is announced, having not

previously been recognised and segregated. Consequent to this discovery, they allow us to augment the original description and offer a good figure of the lectotype now selected from the syntypic series in accordance with Article 74 of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*. The specimen selected as the lectotype is the largest specimen and in a good state of preservation, and has dorsal and anal ray counts (14) closest to those in the original description. The nature of the armature of the opercular bones indicates that the placement of the species in either of the genera *Ambassis* Cuvier or *Chanda* Hamilton-Buchanan *sensu stricto* by earlier ichthyologists, is most inappropriate. The generic relationship of this species, is, however, presently under study.

SYSTEMATIC ACCOUNT

Family : AMBASSIDAE

Ambassis notatus Blyth

Ambassis notatus Blyth, 1861, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 29 :
138 (type-locality : Sittang R., Burma).

LECTOTYPE (Fig. 1), herein designated, 56 mm in standard length (SL), Pegu (Burma), coll. Maj. *T. M. Berdmore*; Zoological Survey of India ASB Cat. 28, recatalogued as F 7696/2.

PARALECTOTYPES : 4 ex. (44-53 mm SL), same data as above; ZSI ASB Cat. 28, recatalogued as F 7697/2.

ridge dentate posteriorly only with 3 or 4 backwardly-directed spines; suborbital smooth; preorbital strongly serrated both on its edge and ridge, with a small distinct spine before and opposite middle in front of eye.

Mouth terminal, its cleft at about an angle of 35° with the horizontal; lower jaw



Fig. 1. *Ambassis notatus* Blyth, lectotype, 56 mm standard length, from Burma.

Description : Based on the lectotype and four paralectotypes. Measurements and meristic counts are presented in the table.

Body laterally compressed, its dorsal profile slightly more convex than the ventral profile. Opercular spine indistinct; posterior edge of preoperculum minutely denticulated, its lower arm strongly denticulated but its ridge entire except for 2 or 3 small spines at angle; interoperculum entire. Supraorbital

projecting with a definite chin, fitting with a symphyseal knob in a median toothless depression of upper jaw; upper jaw (maxillary) extending to below middle of eye.

Teeth in narrow bands on the jaws, well differentiated in size, the outermost series enlarged (particularly anteriorly on the upper jaw); upper outer firm and spaced, and near the symphysis small canines (more than twice as long as the other enlarged teeth); inner

series of tiny villiform teeth only, three or four teeth wide at its broadest point anteriorly. Fine teeth on vomer and palatines ; no teeth on tongue.

Gill-rakers on the first arch 6+1+ (15 or 16), finely lanceolate, the one uppermost and two lowest very short. Branchiostegals 6, pseudobranchia moderate, slightly less than eye-diameter.

Dorsal fin of two continuous parts defined by a deep notch between the last and penultimate spines ; first dorsal fin with 7 spines and a procumbent spine, the second spine longest ; last dorsal spine strong and

conspicuously long, about 3 times of penultimate dorsal spine. Anal spines strong, the third longest and slightly longer than the second spine. Pectoral fins long ; pelvic fin 15, the spine strong. Caudal fin forked.

Scales small, cycloid, 64-66 pierced by lateral line, 6 or 7 rows between origin of dorsal fin and lateral line ; predorsal scales 8 or 9. Lateral line continuous to caudal-fin base. A deep scaly sheath at bases of dorsal and anal fins. Pelvic fin with a well-developed axillary scale. Scales on cheek in 6 rows.

Colour : in alcohol, uniform light brown. Fins hyaline ; spinous dorsal fin dusky at tip,

TABLE 1. Selected meristic counts and measurements (in mm) of lectotype and paralectotypes of *Ambassis notatus* Blyth

	Lectotype		Paralectotypes		
	F 7696/2		F 7697/2		
Dorsal fin	VII+I 14	VII+I 14	VIII+I 16	VIII+I 15	VII+I 15
Anal fin	III 14	III 15	III 15	III 15	III 16
Pectoral fin	i 12	i 11	i 11	i 11	i 11
Standard length	56	53	46	44	44.5
Body depth	25	24	20	19	19.5
Head length	20.5	19.2	16	16	16
Eye diameter	6.5	6	5.5	5.5	5
Snout length	4.5	4	3	3.5	3
Interorbital width	5	4.5	4	4	4
Length of upper jaw	8	8	7	7	6
Length of lower jaw	10	9.5	8	8	8
Pectoral fin length	14.5	14	12	11	11
Pelvic fin length	11	11	9.5	9.5	9
Length of 2nd dorsal spine	14	13	13	11	11
Length of 1st spine of soft dorsal fin	11	9	9	8	9
Length of 2nd anal spine	10	10	9.5	8	8
Length of 3rd anal spine	12	11	11	8.5	11

DISCUSSION

Blyth (1861) described *Ambassis notatus* from the Sittang river (Burma) based on a collection by Major T. M. Berdmore, of which five syntypes are extant as discussed later, in the Zoological Survey of India. Blyth gave no size range or number of specimens, so there is no certainty which or how many specimens belonged to the type series.

We have recently discovered five specimens of *Ambassis notatus* from Burma in our collections, presumably Blyth's type series. The five presumptive syntypes from Pegu in the Sittang Valley (Burma), are accessioned under Asiatic Society catalogue number Cat. 28 as *Ambassis baculis* and originated from Major T. M. Berdmore's collections from Burma. There seems no doubt that these are syntypes of *A. notatus* both from their apparent history and study. The standing of these specimens as syntypes of *A. notatus* must now be examined.

Edward Blyth was the zoological curator of the Asiatic Society of Bengal from 1841 to 1862 and his contribution to the ichthyology of the Indian region was considerable. The only contemporary reference to Blyth's 'types' was made by Day (1869). Francis Day had become a member of the Asiatic Society in 1869 and in that year he had worked on their collections and especially on the types of species described by Blyth, 'most of whose type specimens I have thus had the opportunity of examining' The existence of the typical and original specimens of Blyth's contributions to ichthyology that had been transferred from the Asiatic Society of Bengal to the Indian Museum and now the Zoological Survey of India, has been known to one of

the authors (PKT) for a number of years and a great part of Blyth's types have been discovered during curation of the collections. The full history of Blyth's fish collections will be described elsewhere (Talwar, in preparation); a short account of these collections is, however, given by Whitehead and Talwar (1976, p. 131).

Blyth's (1861) report deals 'entirely to fluviatile species, mostly collected by the late Major Berdmore in the Sittang river and its tributaries, with a few notice of new or little known species from the Gangetic streams...'. Since the five specimens of *Ambassis* accessioned under number Cat. 28 were collected by Major Berdmore from the Sittang river and agree in other pertinent details, they are clearly the specimens on which Blyth drew up his original description of *Ambassis notatus*. Further clues to the identification are provided by the specimens themselves. Blyth gives the length of the specimens of *A. notatus* as '2½ in', the present specimens measure in total length 69, 64, 56, 52 and 53 mm (2.7, 2.5, 2.2, 2.1, 2.1 inches). The absence of the types of *A. notatus* in the Australian Museum (Whitley, 1958) and the British Museum which houses some of Blyth's fish types, supports the interpretation that the Zoological Survey of India specimens are the primary types of this species. These five specimens were evidently initially determined as *Ambassis baculis* and registered under this name. This is not at all surprising since several of Blyth's (1861) new taxa, based on Major Berdmore's collections from Burma, are registered under the binomials they were initially determined viz., *Platycaera notata* Blyth as *Discognathus lamta* (regd. no. Cat. 150), *Silurichthys berdmorei* Blyth as *Silurus cochi-*

nensis (regd. no. Cat. 481) and *Systomus macularis* Blyth as *Barbus apogon* (regd. no. Cat. 754). It is curious, however, that Day (1869) did not make any mention of the typical material of *Ambassis notatus*, though he undoubtedly examined the types.

Fraser-Brunner (1954) considered *Chanda siamensis* Fowler (1937) from Thailand identical with *Ambassis notatus* Blyth. We have not seen specimens of the former species, but from its description and figure it warrants a distinct status.

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