

RANGE EXTENSION OF ROUND SCORPIONFISH *NEOMERINTHE EROSTRIS* (ALCOCK, 1896) INTO WATERS OF PAKISTAN (NORTHERN ARABIAN SEA)

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ABSTRACT

Round scorpionfish *Neomerinthe erostris* (Scorpaenidae) was originally described from off southern Sri Lanka. Later on, this species was recorded from Indo-West Pacific mostly in southern oceans except in Taiwan, however, it is not known to be occurring in the Arabian Sea. The specimens from Pakistan were caught at a depth of 130 m southwest of Karachi, Arabian Sea on 22 January 2022. Present paper extends the distribution to this species to further North along the coast of Pakistan in the Arabian Sea.

Key-words: Round scorpionfish, *Neomerinthe erostris*, Arabian Sea, Pakistan coast

INTRODUCTION

Round scorpionfish (*Neomerinthe erostris*) was described as *Scorpaena erostris* by Alcock (1896) based on specimens collected from off Sri Lanka by H. M. Indian Marine Survey Vessel Investigator from Station No. 59 (depth 68 or 84 m). Later on its illustration was published by Alcock (1898). Its holotype is not known, however, lectotype (ZSI F 12977) and paralectotypes (ZSI F 12978) are housed in Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata, India. Information about its types is given by Menon and Yazdani (1968). Motomura *et al.* (2011) included this species to genus *Neomerinthe* created by Fowler (1935)

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The specimen of round scorpion was trawled from offshore waters caught at a depth of 130 m southwest of Karachi, Arabian Sea on 22 January 2022 (Fig.1) using high opening bottom trawl net that has a cod end of mesh size 25 mm. Sample was photographed and preserved in 10 % alcohol.



Fig. 1. Pakistan coast showing collection site of *Neomerinthe erostris*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Round scorpionfish (*Neomerinthe erostris*) was not previously reported by all checklist or previous studies on family Scorpaenidae from Pakistan (Ahmad and Qureshi, 1970; Bianchi, 1985; Hoda, 1985, 1988; Hussain, 2003; Jalil and Khaliluddin, 1972, 1981; Osmany and Moazzam, 2018 and Psomadakis *et al.*, 2015). *Neomerinthe erostris* is characterized by having a distinct longitudinal ridge on the lateral surface of the maxilla and a strongly rounded dorsal profile of the head (Motomura *et al.*, 2015).

Taxonomic Enumeration

Genus *Neomerinthe* Fowler, 1935
Neomerinthe erostris (Alcock, 1896)
 (Fig. 2)

Diagnosis of *Neomerinthe erostris* is primarily based on (Motomura, *et al.*, 2015). Profile of snout almost in the same vertical line with the frontal border of the orbit. Dorsal-fin soft rays 8 or 9; pectoral-fin rays 17–19; lateral surface of maxilla with distinct longitudinal ridge; lateral lacrimal spine absent; 3 suborbital spines; distinct second preopercular spine present; posterior margin of maxilla reaching or extending beyond vertical through posterior margin of orbit; minute slit behind last gill arch; dorsal profile of head strongly rounded; eye large, orbit diameter greater than snout length.

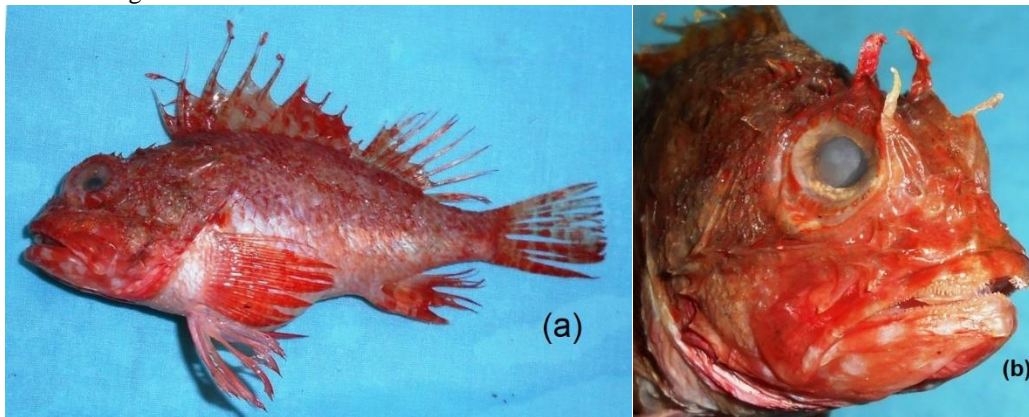


Fig. 2. Round scorpionfish (*Neomerinthe erostris*) collected from offshore waters of Pakistan. (a) Lateral view, (b) Head showing distinct longitudinal ridge.

Remarks

The specimen of round scorpionfish measured to 13.5 cm (TL). It has distinct brownish red, suffused with irregular grey, dark red, and reddish white blotches. The specimens from Pakistan comes in conformation with the description of this species provided by Alcock (1896) and Motomura *et al.* (2015). Its body was moderately compressed anteriorly, progressively more compressed posteriorly (Fig. 2a). Tentacles on posterior ends of bases of most head spines (Fig. 2b) and short, broad tentacle, with several short branches distally. Dorsal profile of snout steep. Fourth dorsal-fin spine longest, fifth to eleventh spines progressively shorter; membrane of spinous portion of dorsal fin moderately notched (Fig. 2a). All pelvic-fin soft rays branched; second soft ray longest, its length slightly greater than upper-jaw length. Interorbital ridges well developed, separated by moderately deep channel, beginning posterior to nasal spines and ending near tympanic spine base. Interorbital space relatively shallow.

Colour

Body strongly variegated, mainly brownish red, suffused with irregular grey, dark red, and reddish white blotches. Spinous portion of dorsal fin with indistinct, broad, longitudinal, grey band, with poorly defined black blotch posteriorly. Soft-rayed portion of dorsal fin, pectoral fin, and caudal fin with indistinct, irregular, small blotches scattered over entire fin.

Distribution

Globally genus *Neomerinthe* is known to have 13 species (WoRMS, 2022) but is not represented in the Arabian Sea or Persian Gulf (Motomura *et al.*, 2015; Froese and Pauly, 2022; Frickle *et al.*, 2022). *Neomerinthe erostris* is, however, widely distributed in the Indo-West Pacific Ocean including Madagascar, Réunion, Yemen, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and the Wallis and Futuna Islands (Motomura *et al.*, 2015; Frickle *et al.*, 2022). Present paper extends its range of distribution to further north to Arabian Sea (Pakistan coast). It was trawled from a depth of 130 m whereas according to Motomura *et al.* (2015) it was recorded from depths of 52–505 m.

CONCLUSION

Round scorpionfish (*Neomerinthe erostris*) is reported for the first time from Pakistan coast (Northern Arabian Sea). In the area it is known from Sri Lanka (type locality) and Yemen (Froese and Pauly, 2022). Elsewhere it is widely distributed in the Indo-Pacific area. This species is characteristically known for having a distinct longitudinal ridge on the lateral surface of the maxilla and a strongly rounded dorsal profile of the head (Motomura *et al.*, 2015).

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