

***Gymnothorax hansii*, a new species of moray eel (Teleostei: Anguilliformes: Muraenidae) from the Comoro Islands, Western Indian Ocean**

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Abstract

Gymnothorax hansii, a new species of moray eel, is described from three specimens caught in ~ 146 m at Grand Comoro (Ngazidja) Island in the Comoros Islands. The length of the head plus the body is distinctly longer than tail; the dorsal fin origin is at a vertical midway between the gill opening and the rear edge of the eye. The head length is 11 to 12% total length. The colour is chestnut brown dorsally on the head, body and most of the tail; the dorsal and anal fins are brown anteriorly, blackish posteriorly with a bright white margin from dorsal fin origin round the tail tip to the anal fin origin; anterior nostril tube, posterior nostril mound and iris are yellow; head and ventrolateral part of body of 101 cm adult male golden brown, with several, irregular, distinct, dusky or black spots scattered over most of the body, tail and dorsal fin; head of 101 cm adult female brown dorsally, paler below; female with a few faint dusky spots on body and tail; both sexes with pores on jaws set in white spots. Teeth small, sharp, caniniform, slightly curved, uniserial on maxillae and dentaries; longest intermaxillary tooth equals 64% eye diameter; vomer with 3 minute teeth. The vertebral counts are higher than in most morays: 4 predorsal, 82–84 preanal and 183–185 total.

Key words: Muraenidae, *Gymnothorax*, Comoro Islands, taxonomy, new species

Introduction

The deep demersal fish fauna of rugged bottom habitats is poorly known and difficult to sample. In October and November 1991, an expedition to Grand Comoro (Ngazidja) to study the biology and ecology of coelacanths (*Latimeria chalumnae* Smith, 1939) provided the opportunity to study and sample the fish fauna in the deep demersal habitat (150 to 400 m) at Ngazidja. In situ observations of the coelacanths and other fish were made with the research submersible *JAGO*, designed, built and operated by Hans Fricke and Jürgen Schauer. Of the 82 fish taxa that were seen, photographed or caught (with hook and