



Comments on the snake-eel genus *Xyrias* (Anguilliformes: Ophichthidae) with the description of a new species

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Abstract

Comments on the snake-eel genus *Xyrias* (Anguilliformes: Ophichthidae) with the description of a new species. *Xyrias chioui*, a new robust snake-eel species, subfamily Ophichthinae, is described on the basis of a specimen caught at 60–70 m depth on a benthic longline off Changbin, Taitung County, eastern Taiwan. It is distinguished from its congeners by having fewer vertebrae (126), 3 postorbital cephalic pores, and biserial rather than multiserial mandibular dentition. A key to the species of *Xyrias* is provided. Additional records of *X. revulsus* from the Arafura Sea and off New South Wales, Australia, extend its depth range from a few to 300 meters. The generic diagnosis of *Xyrias* is expanded such that the maxillary dentition ranges from a biserial to a multiserial condition.

Key words: Ophichthidae, *Xyrias*, new species, Taiwan

Introduction

Snake eels of the genus *Xyrias* are uncommonly captured, generally large in size, and are ferocious in appearance. They are unknown to most fishermen and very rare in museum collections. Their fossorial habits and the moderately deep sand bottoms which they occupy limit their capture to hook-and-line and, rarely, by bottom trawling. Three species are known and were recently reviewed by McCosker (1998): *X. revulsus* Jordan and Snyder (1901), known from Japan to Natal, South Africa, including specimens from Australia, Philippines, and the East China Sea, from a few meters to 300 m depth; *X. multiserialis* (Norman 1939), from the Gulf of Aden and off Somalia, between 220–322 m depth; and *X. guineensis* (Blache 1975), only from Pointe-Noire, Congo, from 300 m depth. To this handsome cadre we add a new species captured by Captain Jiun-Shiun Chiou off eastern Taiwan, and take pleasure in naming it in his honor.

Materials and methods

Counts and measurements follow those used in McCosker (1998). Head pore terminology follows that of McCosker et al. (1989: 257) such that: the supraorbital pores (SO) are expressed as the ethmoid pore + pores in the supraorbital canal, e.g., 1+3; the infraorbital pores (IO) are expressed as pores along the upper jaw + those in the vertical part of the canal behind the eye (the "postorbital pores"), e.g., 4+3, in that frequently the last pore included along the upper jaw is part of the postorbital series; and the preopercular and mandibular pores (POM) are treated together, e.g., 2+5. Vertebral counts (which include the hypural) were taken from radiographs. Vertebral notation and definitions are described in Böhlke (1982). The mean vertebral formula