



## A new earthworm eel of the genus *Chaudhuria* from the Ayeyarwaddy River Drainage, Myanmar (Teleostei: Synbranchiformes: Chaudhuriidae)

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### Abstract

*Chaudhuria ritvae*, new species, from the lower Ayeyarwaddy River Drainage, southern Myanmar, is distinguished from *C. caudata* by a greater number of caudal vertebrae, shorter jaws, larger and broader ribs, neural arches of vertebrae without fenestration, absence of spots associated with base of dorsal- and anal-fin rays, sparse body pigmentation consisting of only minute widely separated melanophores, and absence of pigmentation along pectoral-fin rays. It differs from its only other congener, *C. fusipinnis*, by having the dorsal and anal fins separate from the caudal fin, by a smaller number of dorsal- and anal-fin rays, by a greater number of caudal-fin rays and by the presence of teeth on hypobranchial 3.

**Key words:** Taxonomy; Mastacembeloidei; Irrawaddy delta; small size

### Introduction

Earthworm eels of the family Chaudhuriidae are small, very elongate, fin spine-less percomorphs that live among dense aquatic vegetation and leaf litter in standing or slowly flowing waters of small streams, lakes and ponds in India, Indochina and the Sunda islands (Annandale 1918; Kottelat & Lim 1994; Kullander *et al.* 2000). Currently, the family comprises the following nine species in six genera: *Chaudhuria caudata* Annandale 1918, *C. fusipinnis* Kottelat & Britz in Kottelat 2000, *Pillaia indica* Yazdani 1972; *P. kachinica* Kullander, Britz, & Fang 2000; *Garo khajuriai* (Talwar, Yazdani, & Kundu 1977); *Nagaichthys filipes* Kottelat & Lim in Kottelat 1991; *Chendol keelini* Kottelat & Lim 1994; *C. lubricus* Kottelat & Lim 1994; *Bihunichthys monopteroides* Kottelat & Lim 1994. While representatives of the genera *Chendol*, *Bihunichthys* and *Nagaichthys* are restricted to peat swamp forest habitats in Sundaland (Kottelat & Lim 1994), members of the other three genera *Chaudhuria*, *Pillaia* and *Garo* live in habitats with less extreme water parameters in India and Indochina. *Chaudhuria caudata* is the most widespread of all earthworm eels and has been recorded so far from Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia (Annandale 1918; Kottelat 1985, 1989, 2000; Britz & Kottelat 2003). The only location in Myanmar from which *C. caudata* has repeatedly been collected is the type locality, Inle Lake in the southern Shan State, which is part of the Salween basin. During a field trip to Myanmar in 2003 specimens of *Chaudhuria* were obtained from the Ayeyarwaddy basin in the Ayeyarwaddy Division in southern Myanmar. A closer inspection demonstrated they belong to a new species, which is described herein.

### Material and methods

Specimens of the different chaudhuriid species are difficult to handle and to measure due to the small size of the fish and the bent or contorted condition. In addition, the dorsal and anal fins are usually depressed and their anterior bases obscured and difficult to see. Therefore only few accurate measurements were obtainable, all of which were taken with an ocular micrometer attached to a stereomicroscope, with the exception of