



***Opistognathus albicaudatus*, a new species of jawfish (Teleostei: *Opistognathidae*) from the Andaman Islands**

WILLIAM F. SMITH-VANIZ

Research Associate, Division of Ichthyology, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA.
E-mail: smithvaniz@gmail.com

Abstract

A new species of jawfish, *Opistognathus albicaudatus*, is described based on two specimens, 91.4–94.8 mm SL, from the Andaman Islands. The combination of an elongate upper jaw produced as thin flexible lamina, and a unique colour pattern consisting of an abruptly white caudal fin and gill arches with a series of 8–10 small dark spots, each near the base of a gill raker, distinguishes the new species from other congeners. Based on morphological similarity and general color pattern, the new species seems to be most closely related to *Opistognathus variabilis*. These two species appear to have allopatric distributions. A range extension for *O. cyanospilotus* is also reported.

Key words: Jawfish, *Opistognathus*, new species, Andaman Islands

Introduction

The jawfish family *Opistognathidae*, includes about 50 currently recognized Indo-West Pacific species plus many undescribed species. All of them occupy burrows which they construct and maintain using their wide mouths. Their obligatory burrow dwelling behavior makes most jawfishes difficult to observe and capture by standard methods except for the occasional trawl collection. Fortunately, the increasing use of scuba has enabled intrepid ichthyologists to seek out jawfish habitat and with a little experience learn to recognize and locate their burrow openings. Because jawfish rarely leave occupied burrows, they can easily be collected by squirting a mixture of the anesthetic clove oil down their burrows and then capturing the anesthetized fish with a hand-net after they emerge. Gerry Allen, Mark Erdmann and Jack Randall, in particular, have all had the good fortune and opportunity to dive at many locations throughout the Indo-West Pacific, photographing and collecting fishes. Each of them has made a special effort to collect jawfishes and for that reason alone discovery of new species of Indo-Pacific jawfishes continues seemingly unabated. One such recent discovery is the new species described herein. This new *Opistognathus* has the posterior end of its long upper jaw produced as a thin flexible lamina. Had this species been collected earlier it would have been treated by Smith-Vaniz (2009) along with several other jawfishes with similar jaw morphology. The difficult to collect habitat together with a distribution probably limited to the Andaman Islands is the reason this species of *Opistognathus* was not collected until very recently.

Material and methods

Type specimens are deposited in the Western Australian Museum, Perth (WAM). Methods and format of the description follows Smith-Vaniz (2009).