



Himantura randalli sp. nov., a new whipray (Myliobatoidea: Dasyatidae) from the Persian Gulf

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Abstract

A new whipray, *Himantura randalli* sp. nov., described from material collected off Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar, appears to be endemic to the Persian Gulf. It has been frequently confused with forms of the more widely distributed whipray *Himantura gerrardi* Gray and other presently unidentified species from the Indian Ocean. *Himantura randalli* sp. nov. is distinguished from these species by a combination of characters, i.e. disc shape, morphometrics, squamation (including its rapid denticle development and denticle band shape), plain dorsal disc coloration, and whitish saddles on a dark tail in young. It is a medium-sized whipray with a maximum confirmed size of 620 mm disc width (DW) and a birth size of around 150–170 mm DW. Males mature at approximately 400 mm DW. *Himantura randalli* sp. nov. is relatively abundant in the shallow, soft-sedimentary habitats of the Persian Gulf from where it is commonly taken as low-value or discarded bycatch of gillnet and trawl fisheries.

Key words: Dasyatidae, *Himantura randalli*, Arabian whipray, new species, Persian Gulf, northwestern Indian Ocean

Introduction

The genus *Himantura* consists of three subgroups (Manjaji, 2004) and one of these, a subgroup of mainly spotted, ocellated or reticulated whiprays, has been referred to as the ‘uarnak’ species complex. In her revision of the genus, as part of a doctoral thesis, Manjaji included 7 valid nominal species in this taxonomically confusing group, namely *Himantura fai* Jordan & Seale, 1906, *H. gerrardi* (Gray 1851), *H. jenkinsii* (Annandale 1909), *H. leoparda* Manjaji-Matsumoto & Last 2008 (as *H. sp. A*), *H. toshi* Whitley 1939, *H. uarnak* (Gmelin 1789), and *H. undulata* (Bleeker 1852). Last *et al.* (2008) later divided *H. toshi* into two Australian endemic taxa, and described a new species *H. astra* Last, Manjaji-Matsumoto and Pogonoski 2008, for one of these taxa from the Arafura Sea and Gulf of Carpentaria. In addition, Manjaji (2004) also recognised an additional 3 undescribed species from the *uarnak* complex, namely *Himantura* sp. B (from material collected from the Persian Gulf, and off Oman and South Africa), *H. sp. C* (from coastal Pakistan) and *H. sp. D* (off Pakistan and India).

In a guide to the coastal fishes of Oman (Randall, 1995), a species of the genus *Himantura* was briefly described and figured as *H. gerrardi* based on a single 248 mm disc width (DW) specimen from Kuwait. Inspection of this specimen soon after by one of us (PL) confirmed that this species, while closely related, is not conspecific with *H. gerrardi* and was subsequently treated as *H. sp. B* by Manjaji (2004). Randall (1995) recorded this ray as being widespread in the eastern Indian Ocean, ranging westward to Natal, off southern Africa. Manjaji (2004) also included southern Africa in the range of *H. sp. B*, primarily based on personal communications with J. Randall and P. Last.

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in shark and ray taxonomy in Arabia, notably off Oman (by A. Henderson in the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea) and by one of the authors (AM) in the Persian Gulf (including Kuwait and Qatar), leading to the acquisition of important comparative material (with tissue samples for