



<http://dx.doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.4060.1.4>

<http://zoobank.org/urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:19B6DC57-023E-415B-936A-09B5DE8E5DBF>

Three new species of the genus *Chlopsis* (Anguilliformes: Chlopsidae) from the Indo-Pacific

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Abstract

Three new species of false moray eels belonging to the genus *Chlopsis*, family Chlopsidae, are described and illustrated. *Chlopsis sagmacollaris*, from Western Australia, is characterized by its distinct color pattern with a unique dark saddle on the nape and paler body pigmentation than all other congeners. *Chlopsis nanhaiensis*, from Taiwan, has a bicolored body with its dorsal-fin origin behind a vertical through posterior margin of gill opening. These characters are shared with *C. apterus*, *C. bicolor*, *C. bidentatus* and *C. orientalis* sp. nov., but *C. nanhaiensis* has fewer total vertebrae than other bicolored species (ca. 120 in *C. nanhaiensis* vs. 125–140 in other four species). *Chlopsis orientalis*, from Vietnam, is distinguished from all other congeners except *C. bicolor* by its simple bicolored body, head length (ca. 10 % of total length), position of dorsal-fin origin (distinctly behind a vertical through posterior margin of gill opening), and counts of preanal and total vertebrae (35 and 135). Although *C. orientalis* resembles *C. bicolor* in meristics and morphometrics, it differs in its pigmentation and possession of stouter intermuscular bones. These new species represent the first records of the genus *Chlopsis* from the northwestern Pacific Ocean and the eastern Indian Ocean.

Key words: taxonomy, Pisces, *Chlopsis*, *nanhaiensis*, *orientalis*, *sagmacollaris*

Introduction

The family Chlopsidae (false morays) is a small group of eels, including eight genera and 22 species (Eschmeyer 2014). Although several species are very common (e.g. *Kaupichthys hyoprroides* in the Atlantic Ocean), most species are rarely collected because they live in cryptic habitats and their body sizes are small (Smith 1989; Smith 1999). The genus *Chlopsis* is one of the most diverse genera in the family with a total of eight valid species. The genus is characterized by the following characters: intermaxillary teeth in a round to oval patch; vomerine teeth in two longitudinal series, close-set anteriorly, diverging by mid-row and then converging posteriorly, one row or two rows anteriorly and one row posteriorly on each side; no flange along lower lip; one lateral-line pore; dorsal-fin origin anterior to mid-trunk; no pectoral fins (Smith 1999). The most recent reviews of the genus *Chlopsis* were by Lavenberg (1988), Smith (1989), and Tighe & McCosker (2003). Lavenberg (1988) recognized four species from the eastern Pacific: *C. apterus* (Beebe & Tee-Van, 1938), *C. bicollaris* (Myers & Wade, 1941), *C. kazuko* Lavenberg, 1988 and *C. longidens* (Garman, 1899). *Chlopsis longidens* is based on a leptocephalus and is probably the larva of one of the other eastern Pacific species. However, Lavenberg (1988) did not conclusively identify this species with an adult, but indicated that it was likely the larva of *C. bicollaris*. For this reason, we do not recognize