

OCCURRENCE OF A LARGE SHOAL OF JAVANESE COWNOSE RAY,
RHINOPTERA JAVANICA MULLER & HENLE IN THE
BAY OF BENGAL OFF MADRAS

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The Javanese Cownose Ray, *Rhinoptera Javanica* Muller & Henle is known to congregate in large shoals and enter the coastal waters during the breeding season. Shipley and Hornell (1906) have reported the capture of 7000 individuals in a single net in Dutch Bay, Ceylon during the pearl fishery season of 1889. The occurrence of such shoals consisting of 500 to 4000 rays have been recorded in the Gulf of Mannar in India during the months of December-February (James 1962, 1970). Such shoals of *R. javanica* had not been recorded in any other area along the Indian coast.

The present note records the occurrence of a large shoal of this fish in the area 13°10'N and 80°20' S off Madras in the northerly direction at a depth of 5 fathoms on 3-4-1973. According to fishermen who sighted the shoal the major portion of the shoal escaped the net. Therefore, the exact number comprising the shoal could not be estimated. However, 690 fish were landed by the fishermen at Royapuram. The size range of the fish varied from 102 to 156 cm and the weight from 15 to 25 kg. 85% of the fish landed were female and most of them were gravid and measured over 128 cm, thus confirming the nature of migration during this period of occurrence in the coastal waters, as recorded earlier by James (1962, 1970). The stomachs of these fishes were empty. Probably they do not feed during their breeding migration into coastal waters.

The present study indicates that the shoals of *R. javanica* are not confined to Gulf of Mannar alone. but extend northward into the Bay of Bengal, atleast as far as Madras.

It would be worthwhile to investigate the distribution of this species in our waters, the location of their spawning ground and other biological and oceanographical factors, to explain such occurrence of this species in the coastal waters.

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