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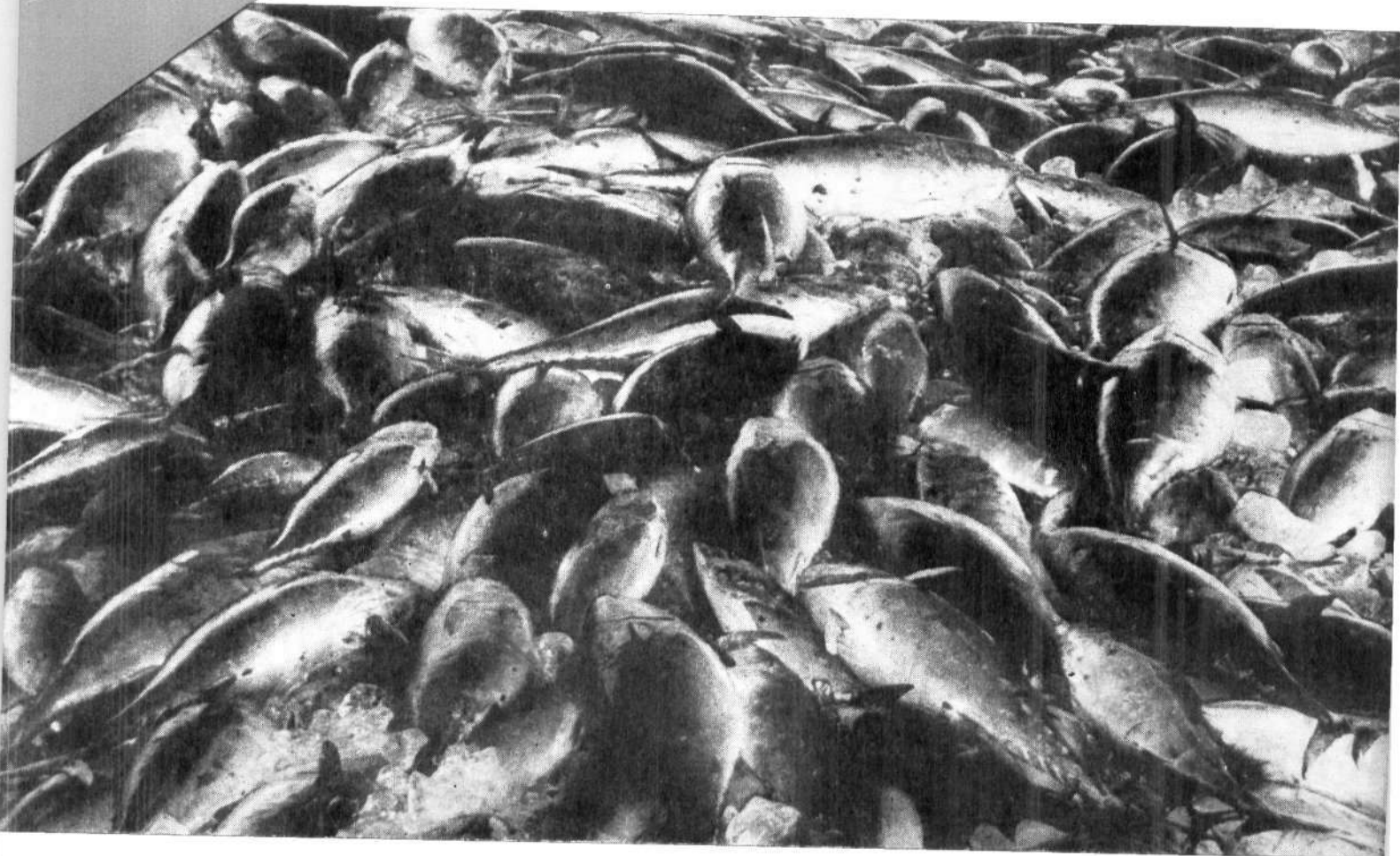
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TUNA FISHERIES OF THE EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE OF INDIA: Biology and Stock Assessment

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FISHERY AND BIONOMICS OF TUNAS AT VIZHINJAM

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Vizhinjam ($76^{\circ}59'E$, $8^{\circ}22'N$) is an important fish landing centre owing mainly to its location which affords facilities for operation of boats even during the monsoon season and accessibility to the nearby markets. With the Fisheries Harbour construction underway, the fisheries importance of this area is bound to increase further. Details of common nets employed in the centre and the modes of their operations were described earlier by Nayar (1958), Bennet (1967) and Luther *et al.* (1982). Rao (1964) described the ripe ovaries of some Indian tunas from Vizhinjam and summarised that *E. affinis*, *A. thazard* and *S. orientalis* spawn in the local waters from April to September and possibly in other months of the year. According to him, the spawn ripe individuals of the above three species indicate the existence of an important spawning ground for them off Vizhinjam.

FISHING AREA

Fishing area for tunas and allied fishes extends from Valia veli in the north to Kollengode in the south within the 40-80 m depth zone (Fig. 1). This area is influenced considerably by the SW and NE monsoons and upwelling, and the concomitant changes in the hydrographical features. Divakaran *et al.* (1983) described the plankton production in the Vizhinjam inshore waters and indicated the availability and abundance of different groups of zooplankton groups in this area.

CRAFTS AND GEARS

At Vizhinjam tunas are mainly caught in the drift gillnets, and hooks and lines. In certain months, shoals of coastal species of tunas come so close to the shore that they are captured in the shore seines operated in the fore-shore waters.

About 60% of the total tuna landings is by the drift gillnets and the rest by the hooks and lines. Both mechanised and non-mechanised crafts are engaged

in the operation of both the gears. The tuna landings by other gears such as shore seines and Konchuvalla (gillnet) are insignificant.

The crafts used are catamarans and dugout canoes. Four pieces of logs of 6.3 m length are tied together

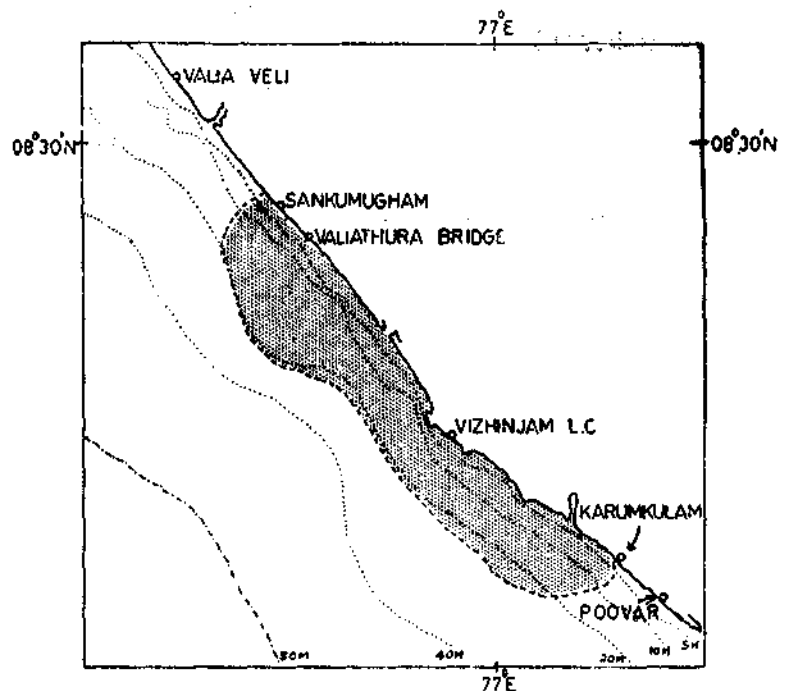


Fig. 1. Operational core area of drift gillnetters and hooks and line fishery at Vizhinjam.

to form one catamaran unit and three fishermen operate one unit. The canoes are dugout, carved from a single log and it has a length of 8 m and depth of 1 m and 3-4 fishermen operate these canoes. Usually drift gillnet operation is suspended during the monsoon months. Of late, mechanised boats of 7.9 m OAL and 16-40 HP are also employed in the fishery.

Drift gillnets are made of nylon yarn. The stretched mesh size is 5-10 cm. The nylon twine has completely replaced cotton and hemp twine as net making materials. The net is preserved by dipping it in a concoction prepared by boiling tamarind in water.

The drift gillnet fishermen leave the shore for fishing by 1600 hrs and they sail in a north by north-west direction. They take 2-3hrs to reach the fishing ground. Generally two hauls are made and the soaking time vary between 2-3 hrs. They return to the shore by about 0600-0800 hrs the next day. The fish catches are auctioned and taken to different markets.

Hooks and line fishery employ longline (choonda) and small hooks (achil). In the longline, fishermen use hooks of size No. 4 and 9 in varying numbers and the line used is nylon (Kangoos). Achil has hooks of size No. 16 and no bait is used. The area of operation is the same for the drift gillnet fishery in a little farther off. The craft used in this fishery is catamaran and manned generally by two fishermen. They leave the shore by 0600 hrs and return at about 1400-1800 hrs. Now a days, catamarans fitted with Yamaha outboard engines (8 HP) are popular among the fishermen. The fuel used is diesel and kerosine mixed in equal proportions.

EFFORT, CATCH AND CPSE

The average standard effort for the period 1979-1982 was 3060 units and the average catch was 258 tonnes of tunas (Fig. 2).

In 1979, maximum standard effort expended was in May (10120 units) and minimum in July. The catch recorded a maximum of 122 tonnes in October with CPSE at 44.50 kg, although during April and July, it was 12.2 kg and 17.0 kg respectively. In 1980, the effort expended was maximum (11,647 units) in June and catch was also highest in that month (207 tonnes) As in the case in 1979, the CPSE in 1980 was highest in October (44.5 kg). In 1981, maximum effort put in was in September (6667 units), but the catch was at its peak in May (147 tonnes), and maximum CPSE was also in May (33.2 kg) with a secondary maximum in November (13.8 kg). In 1982, 12,864 units were in operation in October and the maximum catch recorded was in May (64 tonnes) and maximum CPSE of 27.1 kg was recorded in September.

Based on the pattern of fluctuations in CPSE in the tuna fishery at Vizhinjam, it is observed to be irregular,

showing peaks in the monsoon, pre-monsoon and post-monsoon months during the period under report.

SPECIES COMPOSITION

E. affinis and *A. thazard* were represented in the catches throughout the year. But for *A. rochei*, *S. orientalis*, *T. albacares* and billfishes definite periodicity was observed. *A. rochei* appeared in the fishery during pre-monsoon months, *S. orientalis* during pre-and post-monsoon months and *T. albacares* and billfishes during the pre-monsoon months.

In 1979, *E. affinis* contributed to 51.6% and *S. orientalis* and *A. thazard* 27.5% and 14.8% respectively of the total catch (Fig. 3). The percentage composition of *E. affinis* increased during the years 1980, '81 and '82 (55.0%, 68% and 71.6%) while that of *S. orientalis* showed a decreasing trend in these years, their share being 9.8%, 3.1% and 1.2% respectively of the total catch. *A. thazard* constituted 18-20% and billfishes 3-4% of the total catch in all these years.

LENGTH DISTRIBUTION

The data on Length frequency distribution is available for *E. affinis* and *A. thazard* for the years 1981 and 1982 (Figs. 4 & 5).

Annual pooled length distribution of *E. affinis* indicate that in 1981 the major modes were at 26, 38 and 50 cm. A minor mode was present at 58 cm. In 1982, the major modes were at 30, 34, 50 and 58 cm. With regard to *A. thazard* the annual pooled length distribution evinced a bimodal peak in 1981 and 1982 at 30 and 34 cm (Fig. 6).

Monthly variation in size distribution is presented in Figs. 5 and 6, for the two species for the years 1981 and 1982. In 1981 *E. affinis* occurred in the 22-72 cm size group. The major modes increased from January and during August smaller individuals with a peak at 26 cm was recorded. Further increase in the modal classes was evident from September onwards. In 1982, major modes were around 34 and 50 cm. *A. thazard* occurred in the size range 22-50 cm in 1981 and their major modes were around 28, 34, 40 and 42 cm. In 1982, from February to May, modal progress was clearly perceptible and during September, November and December their modes were at 30-32 cm size group.

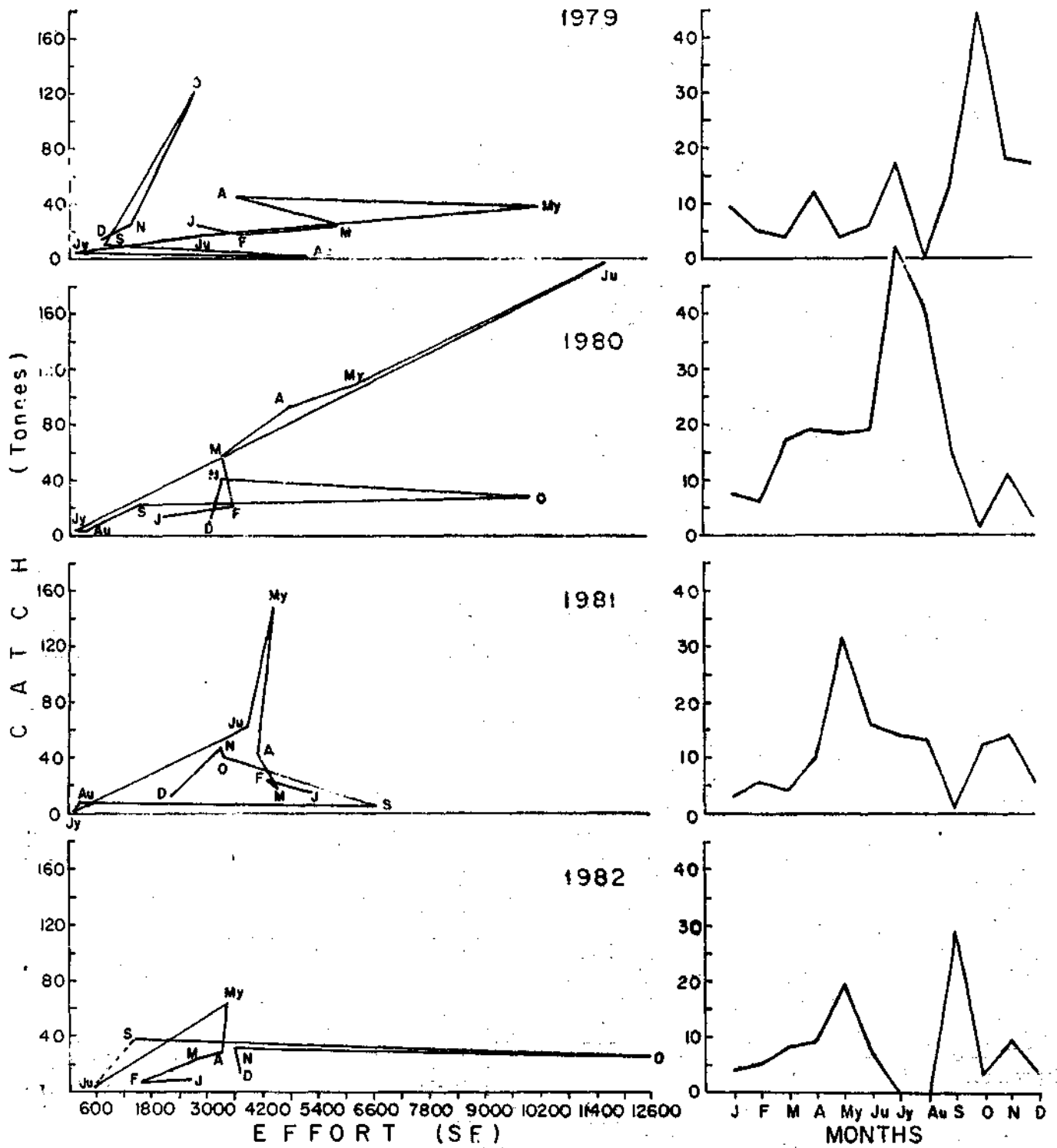


Fig. 2. Catch-standardized effort relationship of tunas at Vizhinjam, 1979-'82.

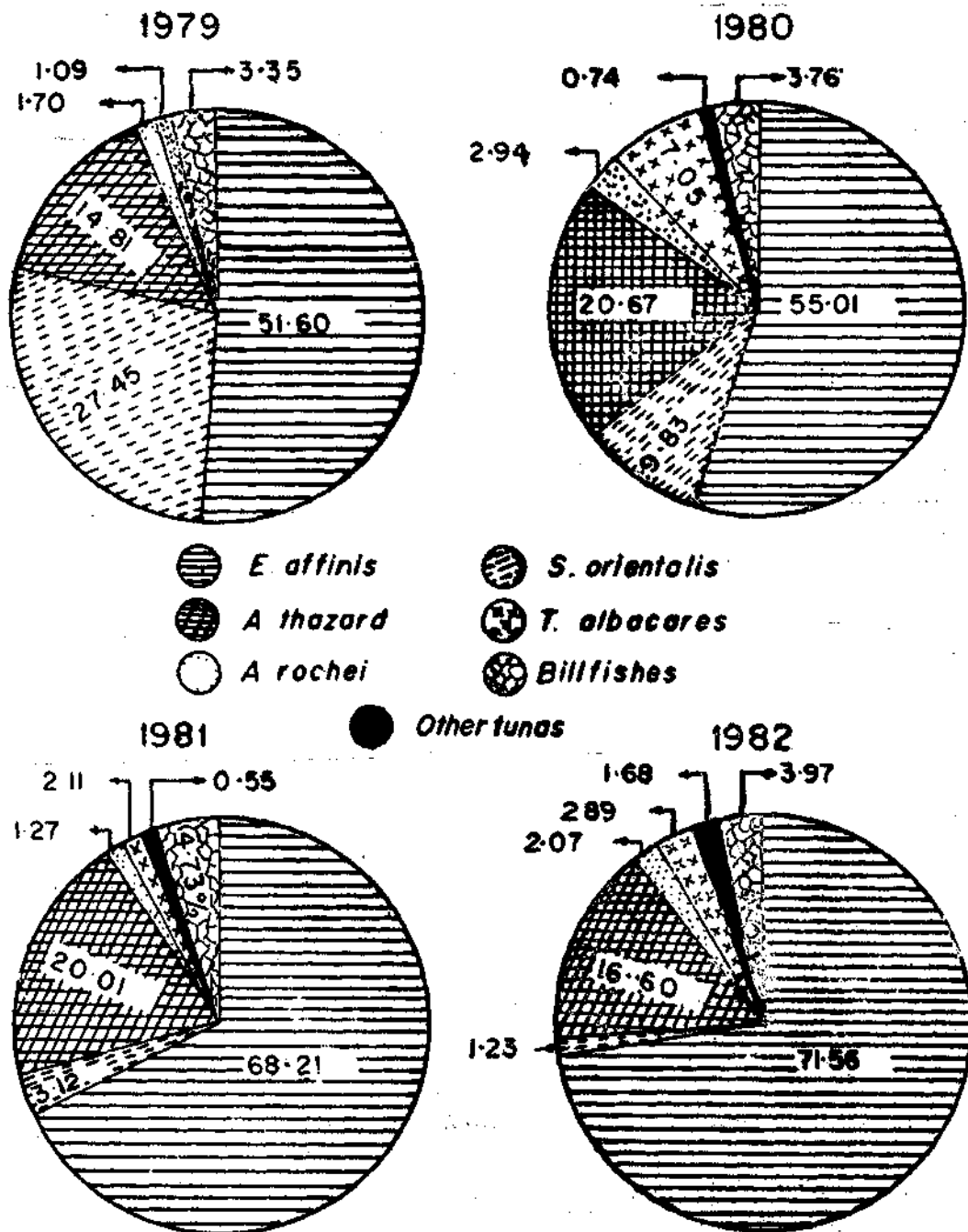


Fig. 3. Percentage composition of different species of tunas and bill-fishes at Vizhinjam, 1981-'82.

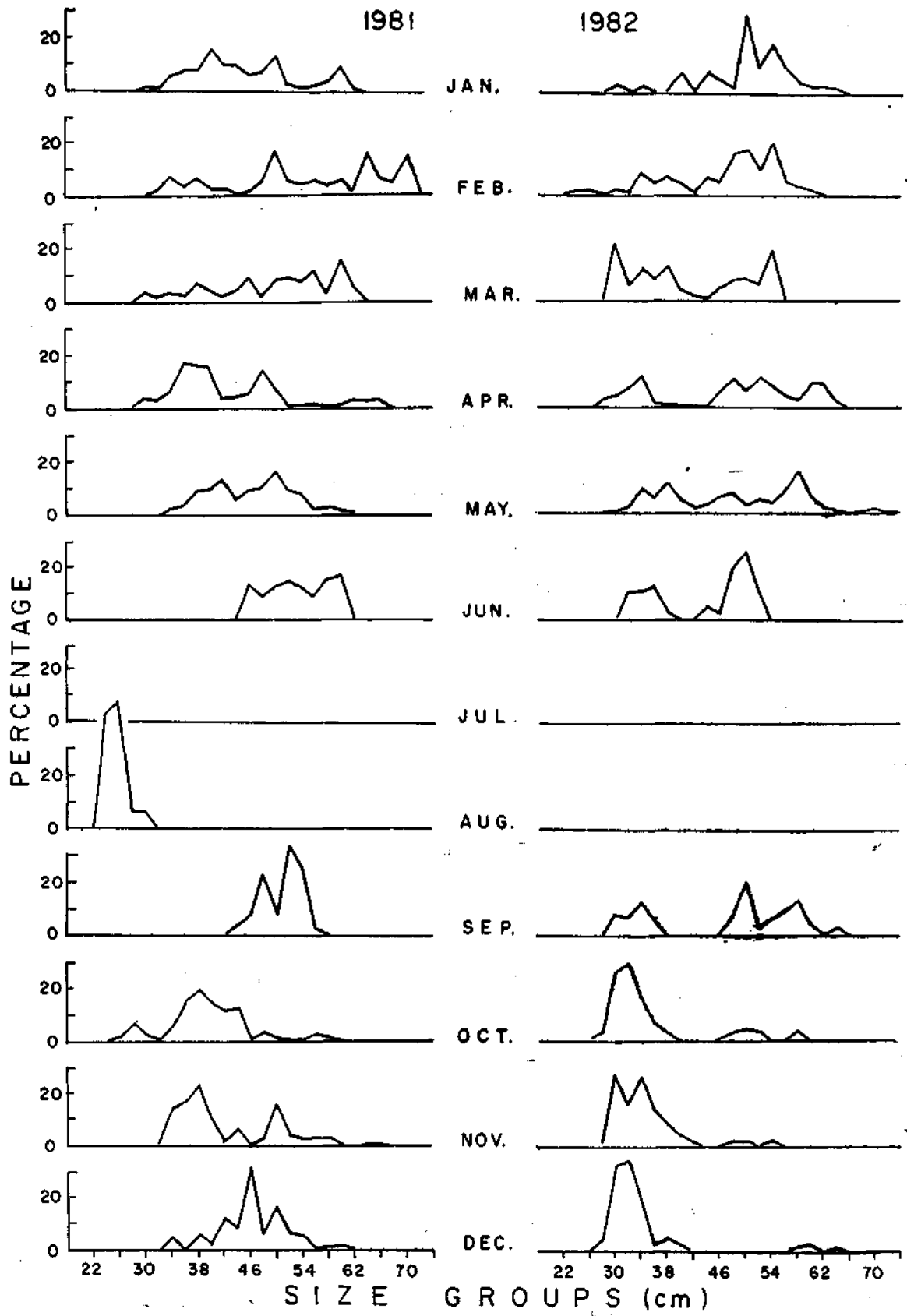


Fig. 4. Monthly length frequency distribution of *E. affinis* at Vizhinjam, 1981-'82.

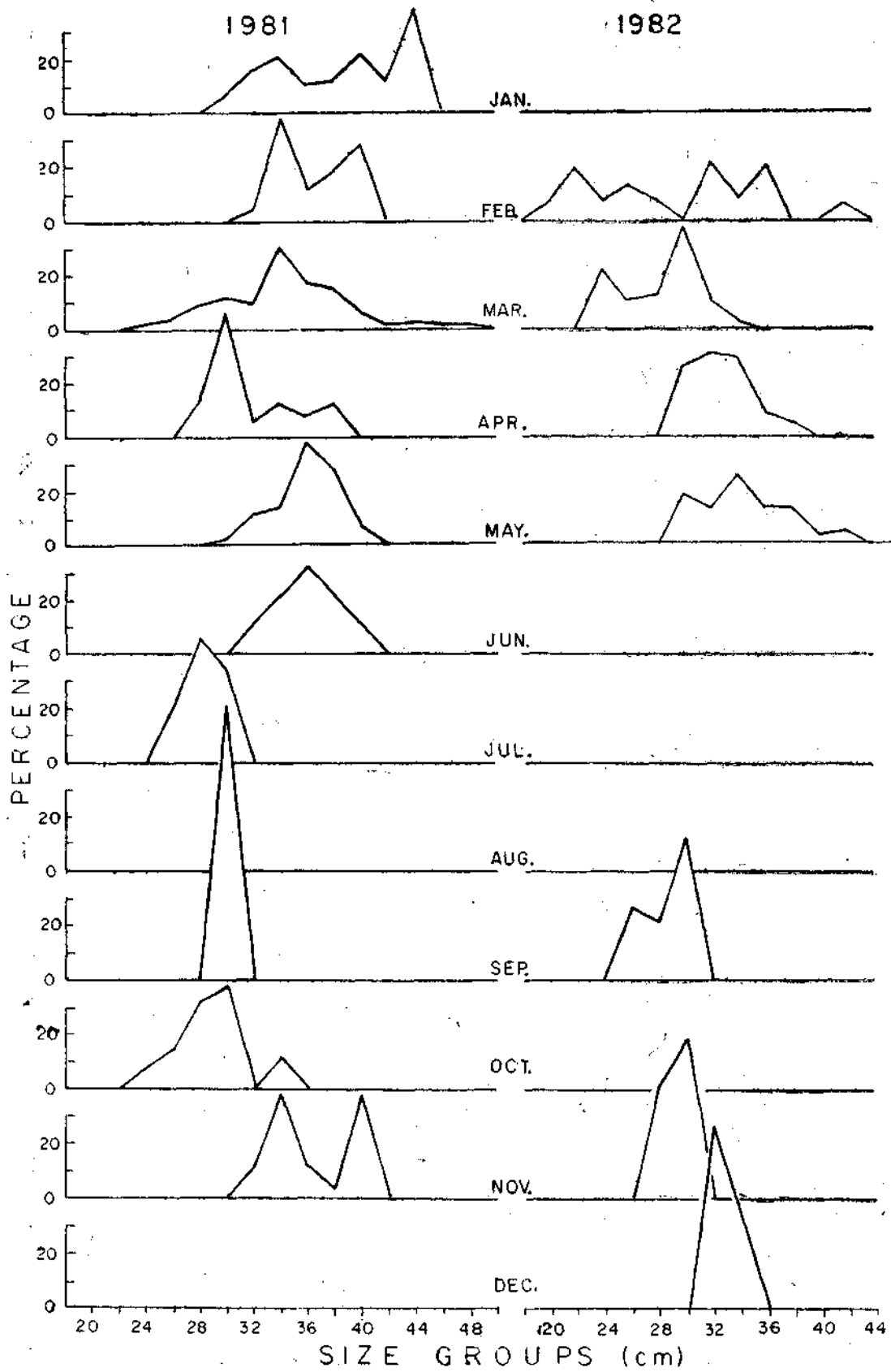


Fig. 5. Monthly length frequency distribution of *A. thazard* at Vizhinjam, 1981-'82.

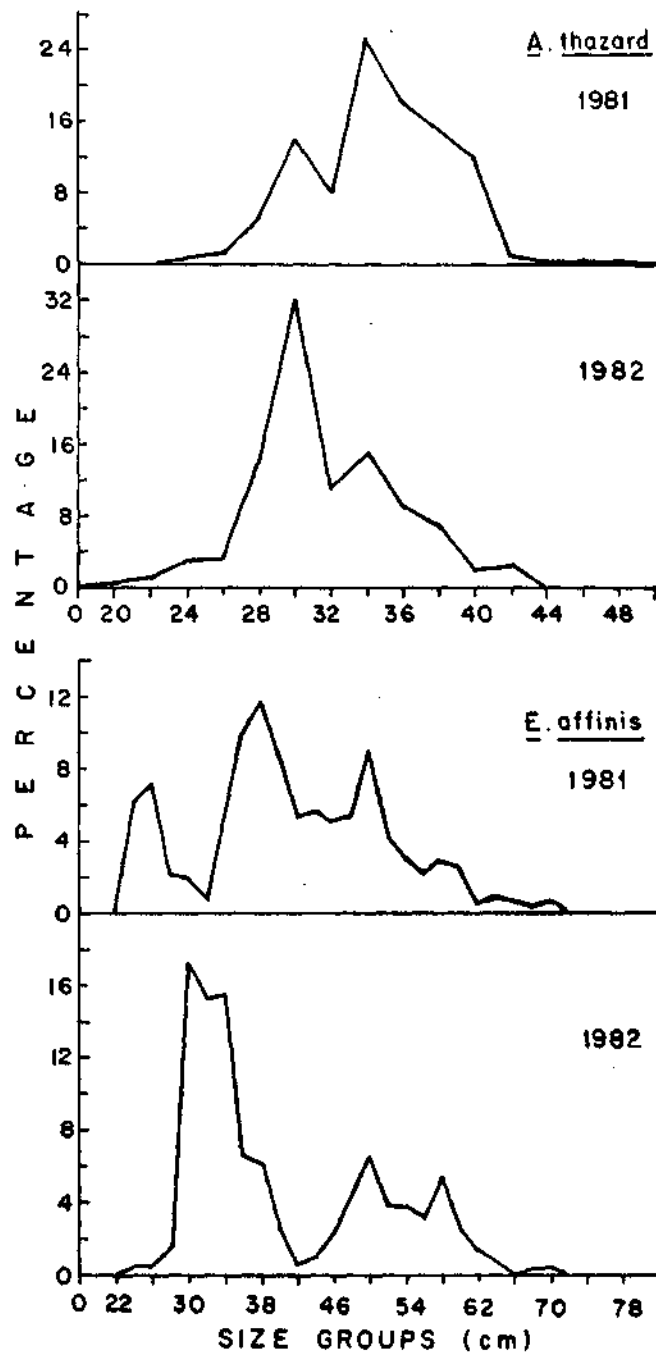


Fig. 6. Pooled annual length frequency distribution of *A. thazard* and *E. affinis* at Vizhinjam, 1981-'82.

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