

Vizhinjam Coast

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On the 13th of July 2009, unusual heavy landings of *Aluterus monoceros* (unicorn leather jacket) of the family Monacanthidae were observed along the coast, from Vizhinjam to Marianadu about 40 km north of Vizhinjam (Fig. 1). These fishes, locally known as “komban clathy” or “mara clathy” are rarely observed in large numbers in the landings at

Vizhinjam which has become a subject of surprise to the fishermen. This has been the first incident of such a heavy landing of bigger sized unicorn leather jacket in this area.

A total of 450 t of fishes were caught in boatseines during 4 days from 12-7-2009 to



Fig. 1. Heavy landings of *Aluterus monoceros* at Vizhinjam Fishing Harbour

15-7-2009. The fishes had a highly compressed grey coloured body with faded brown round spots on their upper side, a protruding mouth with convex head and a single slender dorsal spine. The positions of their eyes are so characteristic that they are seen on the posterior portion of the head (Fig. 2).

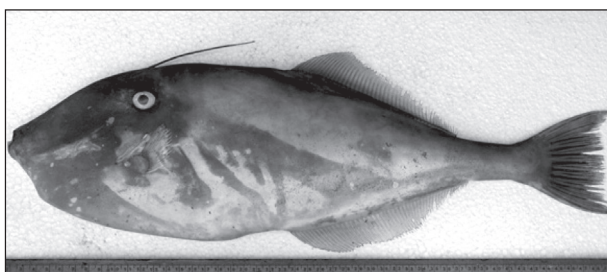


Fig. 2. *A. monoceros* (Unicorn leather jacket)

It was also observed that almost the entire landings by each boat consisted of this fish. Small quantities of *Stolephorus indicus*, squids, cuttle fishes and non-edible crabs ranging from 1 to 5 kg were also present in the catch. The catch per unit ranged from a minimum of 10 kg to a maximum of 600 kg. The fishes were transported to fish processing/cold

storage units. The price at the landing centre ranged from Rs. 25/- to Rs. 45/- for a single fish weighing 500 g to 1.2 kg.

Samples were randomly selected from the catches and measurements of body length, alimentary canal, body weight, liver mass and weight of gonad were recorded. The fishes were examined for their sex and condition of gonads as well as stomach contents. The total length ranged from 43 to 67 cm and body weight from 500 g to 1.121 kg. In all the fishes, stomach was full with completely digested food particles. The length of the alimentary canal was found to be more than three times the length of fishes with an array of secas on their anterior part (Fig. 3). The fishes also possessed large liver mass weighing 65 to 95 g.



Fig. 3. *A. monoceros* showing long alimentary canal and fatty liver

The male gonads were in stage II while the females were in the post-spawning stage. The mean total length, body weight, liver weight, ovary weight, intestine length and gonadosomatic index in respect of females were 52 cm, 987 g, 69 g, 7.25 g, 163 cm and 0.759 whereas in males the average total length, body weight, liver weight and intestine length were 44 cm, 777 g, 65 g and 154 cm respectively.