

## A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE CATFISH FISHERY OFF BLANGAD ON THE SOUTHWEST COAST OF INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

During the period April 1972 to March 1974 catfishes formed 38.85% of the total quantity of fishes stored in the Government cold storage plant at Blangad. *Tachysurus thalassinus* was the dominant species in the landings. The chief food items consisted of crustaceans.

During the period 1960-1968 catfishes formed 2.56% of the total marine fish catch in India of which 0.57% was contributed by Kerala (C.M.F.R.I., 1969). Recent studies on the fishery resources along the west coast of India by Rao et al (1969), Rao and Durairaj (1968) Tholasilingam et al (1968) and Rao (1969) have shown catfishes as an abundant group in the trawler landings. According to Rao (1969), the landings of catfishes are the highest in Kerala among the maritime states and of these the family Tachysuridae contribute a very large number of commercial species. Catfishes being one of the promising resources, the present note on the landings of this group of fishes from Blangad along the south-west coast of India will be of interest.

The data were collected from the Government ice plant-cum-cold storage at Blangad during the period April 1972 to March 1974. The catfishes are landed at this centre entirely by non-mechanised boats using hooks and lines and also the bottom-set gill nets locally called *Ozhuku vala*. Since these units bring their landings in the evenings, the local mechants store the entire catch in the cold storage. Hence it was possible to collect the actual weight of the fish on each day during the period under study.

The actual weight of the catfishes stored during the period is presented month-wise in Table 1. Data for May-July, 1972 and August-September 1973 were not available due to suspension of fishing operations because of monsoon. During 1972, maximum landings were obtained in December (10,714 kg.) when it accounted for 37.18% of the total fish stored and the minimum landings was in April (3931 kg.) forming only 22.16%. During 1973, a high catch was obtained in January (12,436 kg.) followed by December (12,180 kg.), February (11,823 kg.) and March (10,425 kg.) and formed 41.89%, 56.84%, 42.17% and 35.83% respectively of the total fish stored. The minimum catch

during the year was in July (205 kg.) and accounted for only 6.47% of the total fish stored. Though the data were available only for three months during 1974, high catches were noticed in all months: January (17,218 kg.), March (11,779 kg.) and February (11,406 kg.) contributing to 52.32%, 47.7% and 38.5% respectively of all fish kept in the storage. For the period as a whole, catfishes formed 38.85% of the total quantity of fish stored in the ice plant. From the data gathered and also from the observations made, it can be concluded that the best season for the catfish fishery is December-March period.

TABLE 1. *Weight of catfishes stored in the cold storage, Blangad during April, 1972 to March, 1974.*

	Total weight of catfishes stored	Total weight of fishes stored	Percentage of catfishes
1972			
April	3,931	17,785	22.16
May			
June	No landings		
July			
August	5,593	8,833	63.32
September	5,056	12,535	40.34
October	9,960	17,730	56.18
November	5,924	14,581	40.63
December	10,714	28,816	37.18
1973			
January	12,436	19,663	41.89
February	11,823	28,512	42.17
March	10,425	29,098	35.83
April	1,845	22,775	8.10
May	6,831	21,906	31.18
June	1,140	8,057	14.15
July	205	3,170	6.47
August	No landings		
September			
October	1,809	16,194	11.17
November	3,211	26,768	12.00
December	12,180	21,428	56.84
1974			
January	17,218	32,908	52.32
February	11,406	29,557	38.58
March	11,779	24,672	47.74
Total	1,43,486	3,94,988	38.85

Most of the catfishes landed at Blanged belonged to the family Tachysuridae and the important species identified were *Tachysurus thalassinus* (Rupp.), *T. dussumieri* (Val.), *T. sona* (Ham.), *T. jella* (Day), and *Osteogeneosus militaris* (Linn.). According to Rao (1969) among the catfishes *Tachysurus thalassinus* and *T. dussumieri* are abundant in Kerala and make up an important group in the commercial landings. While recording the length measurements of a few species, it was noticed that most of the large catfishes were *T. thalassinus* which ranged from 563 to 1013 mm in total length during the period of observation. The dominant size group of this species landed during December 1973 to January-March 1974 was 650-850 mm. Observations on the stomach contents indicate the presence of the following items in the order of abundance: prawns (identified mostly as *Metapenaeus dobsoni*), sciaenids, *Apogon* sp., carangids, leiognathids, crabs, squids and flat-fishes. These observations are in agreement with those of Mojumder (1972) and Suseelan and Nair (1972).

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