

## FAO SPECIES IDENTIFICATION SHEETS

FISHING AREA 51  
(W. Indian Ocean)

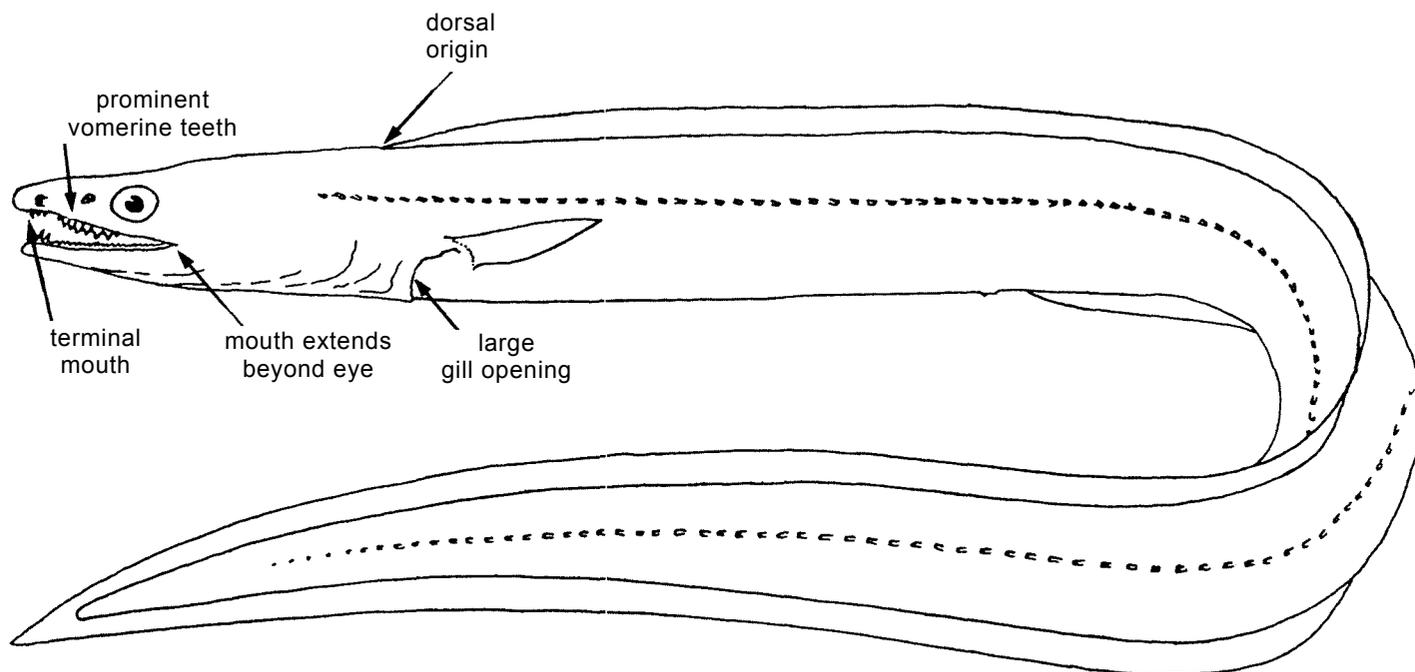
## MURAENESOCIDAE\*

## Pike congers

Body long to very long, more or less cylindrical in front, compressed along tail. Snout very pointed, mouth terminal, large, extending well beyond eye; teeth always large, prominent, especially in front sharp, multiserial on jaws and typically in 3 rows on vomer (roof of mouth); a median row of canines flanked on each side by a row of much smaller teeth; eye relatively large; no lips; nostrils on sides of snout, the anterior one a short, free tube, the posterior one a simple aperture in front of eye; branchiostegal rays long, curving up around throat, but not overlapping ventrally; gill opening a vertical or oblique slit in front of pectoral fin. No spines in fins; dorsal fin begins more or less over gill opening; pectoral fins always present, although reduced to a minute flap or absent in *Gavialiceps*; no pelvic fins. No scales.

Colour: some species yellow. others silvery grey to black or completely black.

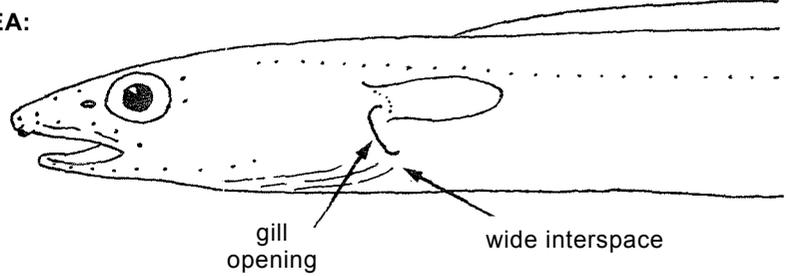
Pike congers are small- to large-sized fishes (to about 250 cm in total length) occurring in tropical waters from the coast out to the deep sea, but principally on the shelf and slope. Their habits are poorly known, but the shallow water species are apparently nocturnal fishes feeding on bottom-living fishes and crustaceans. The species of *Congresox* and *Muraenesox* are valued as food in this area and elsewhere; considerable quantities are landed each year in Japan, southeast Asia and India. The reported catch of pike congers from Fishing Area 51 exceeded 17,000 t in 1980.



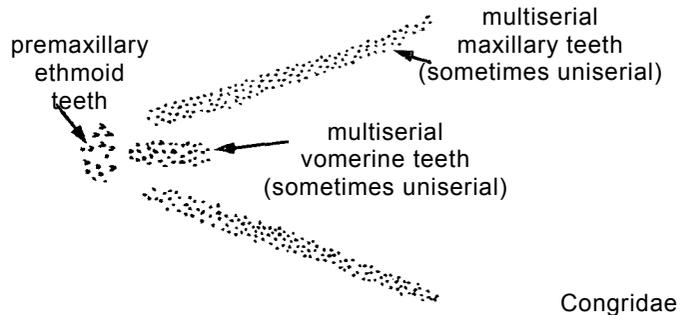
\* Considered as part of Congridae by recent authors, but kept separate here for practical reasons

**SIMILAR FAMILIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:**

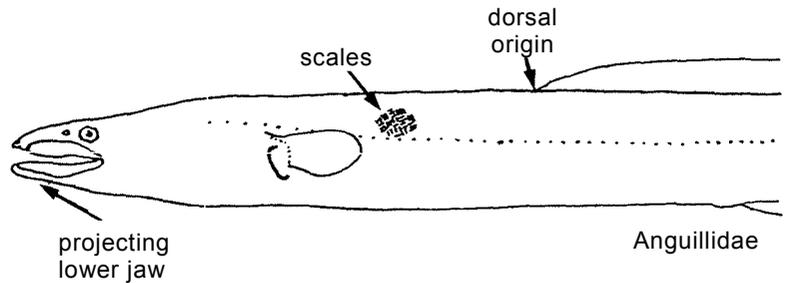
**Congridae:** underside of snout without a conspicuous notch into which lower jaw fits when mouth closed (present in the Muraenesocidae); teeth on vomer (roof of mouth) typically inconspicuous, in a multiserial band or in a single row (prominent and triserial in Muraenesocidae); gill openings are lateral slits which do not nearly meet across midline (gill interspace is externally small in the Muraenesocidae).



**Anguillidae:** body covered with tiny embedded scales (scaleless in Muraenesocidae); lower jaw projecting slightly (equal or slightly shorter in Muraenesocidae); dorsal fin begins about midway between pectoral fins and anus or over anus (always above gill opening in Muraenesocidae).

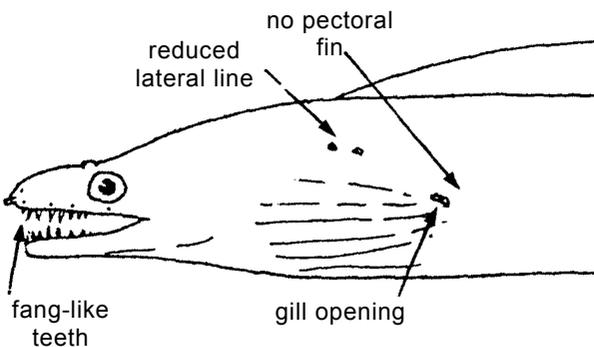
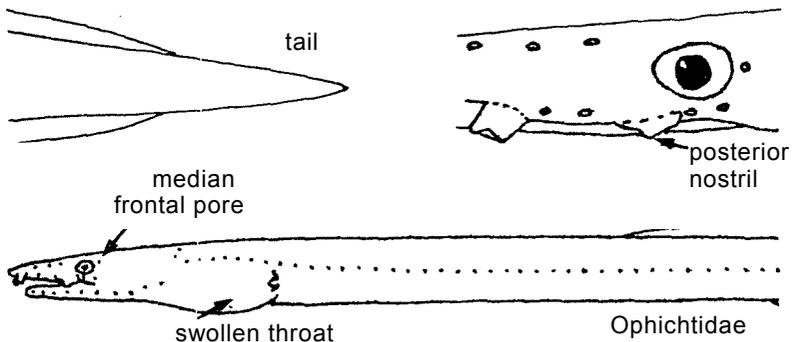


**Ophichthidae:** in most genera no caudal fin but tail tip a hard, burrowing point (caudal fin present in all Muraenesocidae); posterior nostril usually inside mouth or in some way penetrating upper lip (a simple aperture in Muraenesocidae); throat swollen, supported by many branchiostegal rays overlapping in midline; a median frontal pore on head (no such pore in Muraenesocidae).

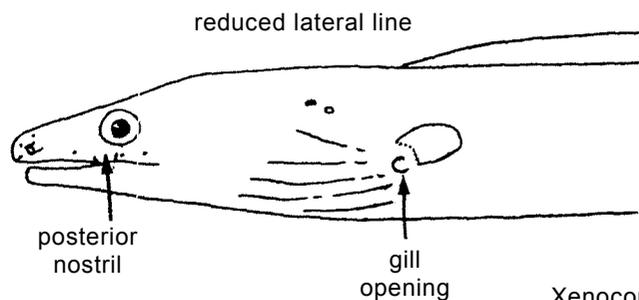


**Muraenidae:** no pectoral fin (always present in Muraenesocidae, except in Gavialiceps where it is absent or reduced to a minute flap); gill opening a small hole (a vertical slit in Muraenesocidae); typically brightly banded, spotted or mottled.

**Xenocongridae:** gill opening a small hole (a vertical slit in Muraenesocidae); vomerine teeth in two divergent rows (a single or several parallel rows in Muraenesocidae); lateral line system reduced (more or less complete though inconspicuous in some Muraenesocidae); posterior nostril low on snout or flap-like; pectoral fins present or absent.



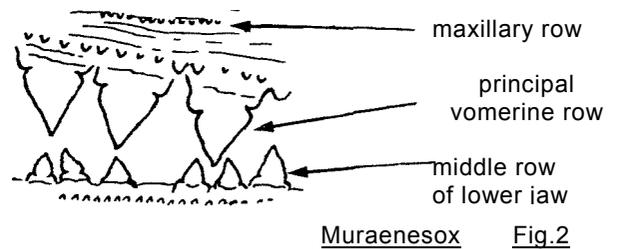
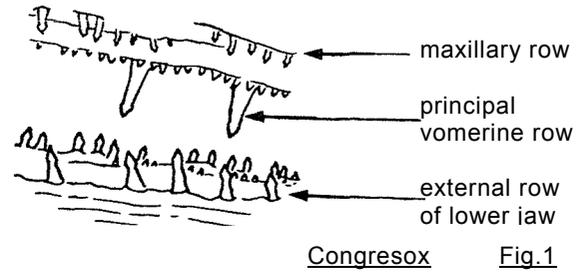
Muraenidae



Xenocongridae

**KEY TO GENERA OCCURRING IN THE AREA:**

- 1a. No conspicuous sensory pores on head
  - 2a. Teeth in jaws uniserial but in the upper jaw flanked by an inner series of smaller teeth ..... Sauromuraenesox
  - 2b. Teeth in jaws multiserial
    - 3a. Largest teeth on lower jaw conical, not laterally compressed, very sharp, without basal bulges, but with slightly swollen tips, directed outward; principal teeth on vomer (roof of mouth) similar but sometimes with weak basal bulges in young (Fig.1) ..... Congresox
    - 3b. Largest teeth on lower jaw laterally compressed, sharp, with prominent anterior and posterior basal bulges, erect; principal teeth on vomer (roof of mouth) similar (Fig-2) ..... Muraenesox
- 1b. Sensory pores on head conspicuous
  - 4a. Pectoral fins present ..... Xenomystax
  - 4b. No pectoral fins ..... Gavialiceps



**LIST OF SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:**

Code numbers are given for those species for which Identification Sheets are included

- |   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| <u>Congresox talabon</u> (Cuvier, 1829)                   | MURAENES Congres 1 |
| <u>Congresox talabonoides</u> (Bleeker, 1853)             | MURAENES Congres 2 |
| <u>Gavialiceps taeniola</u> (Wood-Mason, in Alcock, 1889) |                    |
| <u>Muraenesox bagio</u> (Hamilton-Buchanan, 1822)         | MURAENES Mur 1     |
| <u>Muraenesox cinereus</u> (Forsskål, 1775)               | MURAENES Mur 2     |
| <u>Sauromuraenesox vorax</u> Alcock, 1889                 |                    |
| <u>Xenomystax trucidans</u> (Alcock, 1894)                |                    |

Prepared by P.H.J. Castle, Department of Zoology, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

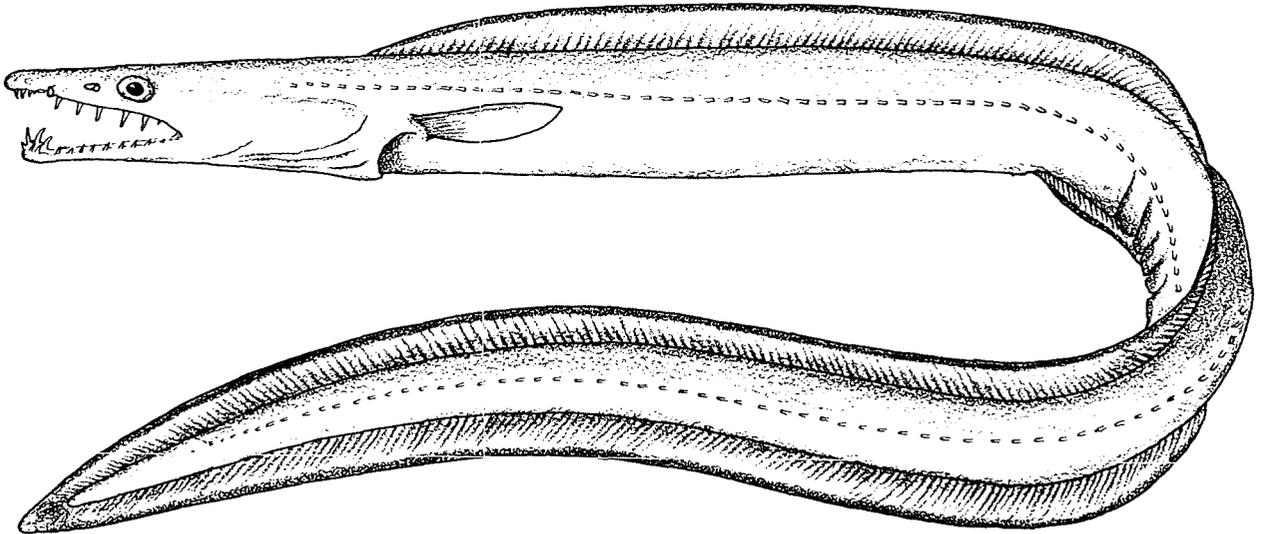
Illustrations provided by author

## FAO SPECIES IDENTIFICATION SHEETS

FAMILY: MURAENESOCIDAE

FISHING AREA 51  
(W. Indian Ocean)

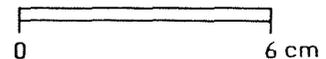
Congresox talabon (Cuvier, 1829)

OTHER SCIENTIFIC NAMES STILL IN USE: Muraenesox talabon (Cuvier, 1829)

## VERNACULAR NAMES:

FAO : En - Yellow pike conger  
Fr - Morénésoce jaune  
Sp - Morenocio amarillo

NATIONAL:



## DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERS:

Body elongate, cylindrical in front, compressed along tail. Head very sharply conical, with the snout and lower jaw markedly lengthened forward so that the mouth is very large, extending to well beyond eye; no lips; eye moderate; teeth generally large, conspicuous, sharp, conical, more or less in three longitudinal rows on jaws and vomer (roof of mouth); outer tooth row on lower jaw leaning outward; teeth of middle row on vomer needle-like (not blade-like) and prominent; tip of lower jaw with its large canines fits into notch in underside of snout when mouth is closed. Dorsal and anal fins continuous with caudal fin around tip of body; pectoral fins well developed and relatively large, their length about 2.5 to 3 times in length of head. Lateral line pores before level of anus 35 to 40. Vertebrae 143 to 149.

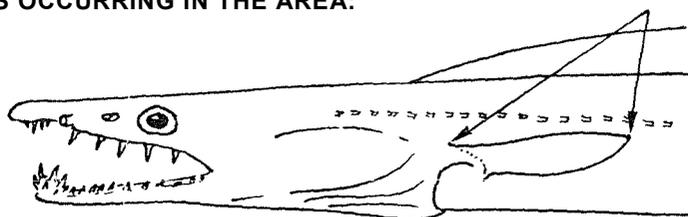
Colour: head and body yellow, tinged with bronze, white below; dorsal and anal fins with narrow, black edges.

**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS OF SIMILAR SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:**

Congresox talabonoides: a much smaller pectoral fin (length about 4 times in head); teeth on vomer (roof of mouth) of smaller specimens less needle-like, with minute, basal cusps; fewer vertebrae (132 to 145, against 143 to 149 in C. talabon); attains 250 cm.

Muraenesox bagio and M. cinereus: flattened, blade-like, vomerine teeth with swollen bases; erect teeth in the principal row of lower jaw; snout much shorter; grey to dark grey-brown body coloration.

Sauromuraenesox vorax (east coast of India): similar but sharper vomerine teeth to those of Muraenesox species; uniserial teeth on jaws.



**C. talabon**



**C. talabonoides**

**SIZE:**

Maximum: 80 cm; common to about 50 cm.

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND BEHAVIOUR:**

Gulf of Mannar (southern India). Also east coast of India eastwards throughout Indonesia.

Lives over soft bottoms down to about 100 m and in estuaries.

A nocturnal fish feeding mainly on bottom fishes and crustaceans.

**PRESENT FISHING GROUNDS:**

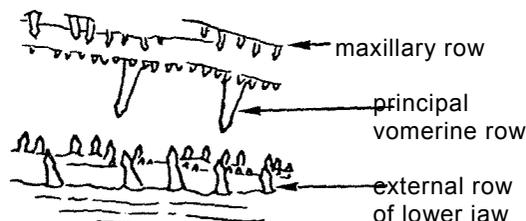
No definite fishing grounds; caught mainly in coastal waters down to about 100 m depth throughout its range.

**CATCHES, FISHING GEAR AND FORMS OF UTILIZATION:**

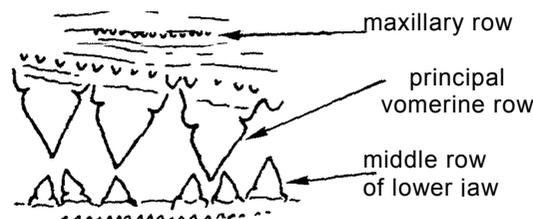
Separate statistics are not reported for this species.

Caught mainly by longline, trawl and drift net at night.

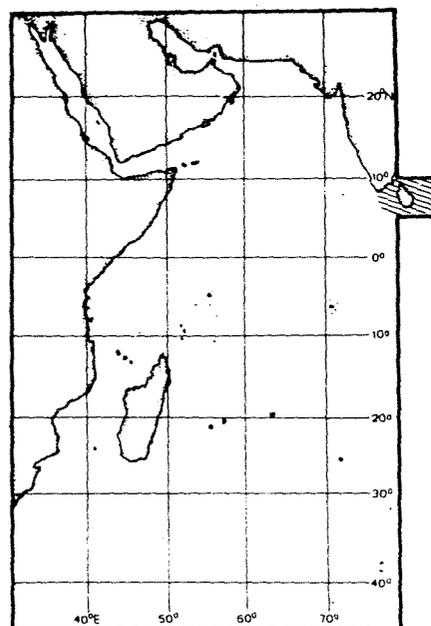
Marketed mainly fresh.



**Congresox**



**Muraenesox**

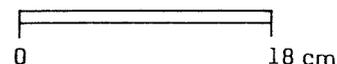
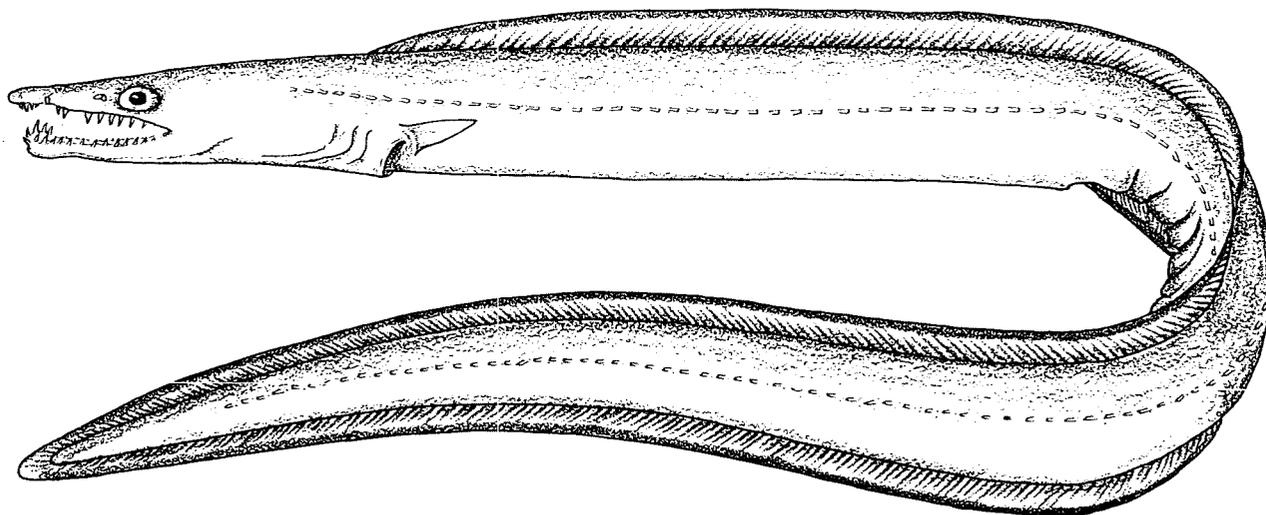


## FAO SPECIES IDENTIFICATION SHEETS

FAMILY: MURAENESOCIDAE

FISHING AREA 51  
(W. Indian Ocean)

Congresox talabonoides (Bleeker, 1853)

OTHER SCIENTIFIC NAMES STILL IN USE : Muraenesox talabonoides (Bleeker, 1853)

## VERNACULAR NAMES:

FAO : En - Indian pike conger  
Fr - Morénoce indien  
Sp - Morenocio indio

NATIONAL:

## DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERS:

Body elongate, cylindrical in front, compressed along tail. Head very sharply conical, with the snout and lower jaw markedly lengthened forward so that the mouth is very large, extending to well beyond eye; no lips; eye moderate; teeth generally large, conspicuous, sharp, conical, more or less in 3 longitudinal rows on jaws and vomer (roof of mouth); outer tooth row on lower jaw leaning outward; teeth on middle row of vomer prominent, needle-like (not blade-like), but with minute basal cusps, especially in small specimens; tip of lower jaw with its large canines fits into a notch in underside of snout when mouth is closed. Dorsal and anal fins continuous with caudal fins around tip of body; pectoral fins relatively small, their length about 4 times in length of head. Lateral line pores before level of anus 41 to 42. Vertebrae 132 to 145.

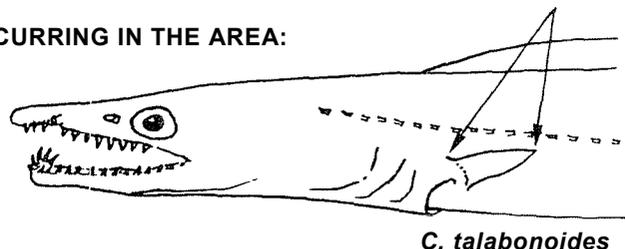
Colour: head and body olive to golden-yellow; vertical fins with narrow dusky edges.

**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS OF SIMILAR SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:**

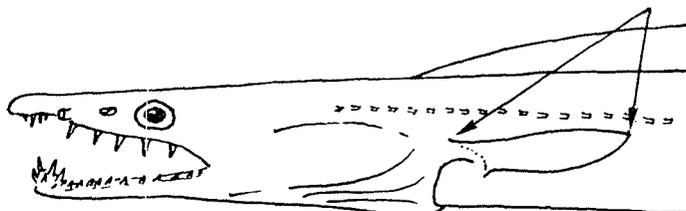
Congresox talabon: pectoral fin much larger (length about 3 times in head); teeth on vomer (roof of mouth) more needle-like in specimens of all sizes, never with basal cusps; more vertebrae (143 to 149, against 132 to 145 in C. talabanoides); attains only about 80 cm.

Muraenesox bagio and M. cinereus: flattened, blade-like vomerine teeth with swollen bases; erect teeth in the principal row of lower jaw; snout much shorter; grey to dark grey-brown body coloration.

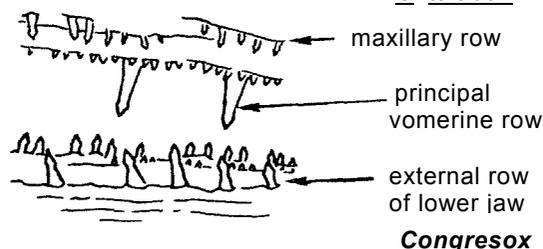
Sauromuraenesox vorax (east coast of India): similar but sharper vomerine teeth to those of Muraenesox species; uniserial teeth on jaws.



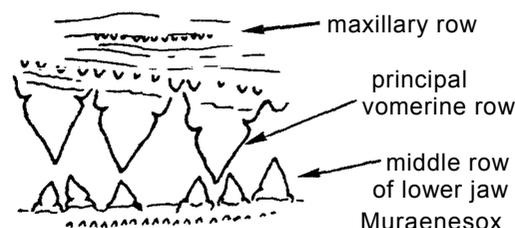
**C. talabanoides**



**C. talabon**



**Congresox**



**Muraenesox**

**SIZE:**

Maximum: 250 cm; common to about 180 cm.

**GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND BEHAVIOUR:**

Red Sea, coasts of India and Sri Lanka. Also eastward throughout Indonesia to the Philippines, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Lives over soft bottoms down to about 100 m depth and in estuaries.

A nocturnal fish feeding mainly on bottom fishes and crustaceans.

**PRESENT FISHING GROUNDS:**

No definite fishing grounds; caught mainly in coastal waters down to about 100 m throughout its range. Yield high in monsoon months in Bombay area where it is caught in 16 to 45 m and above.

**CATCHES, FISHING GEAR AND FORMS OF UTILIZATION:**

Separate statistics are not reported for this species.

Caught mainly by longline, trawl and drift net at night; also by bag ('dol') net.

Marketed mainly fresh.

\* Subject to confirmation

