

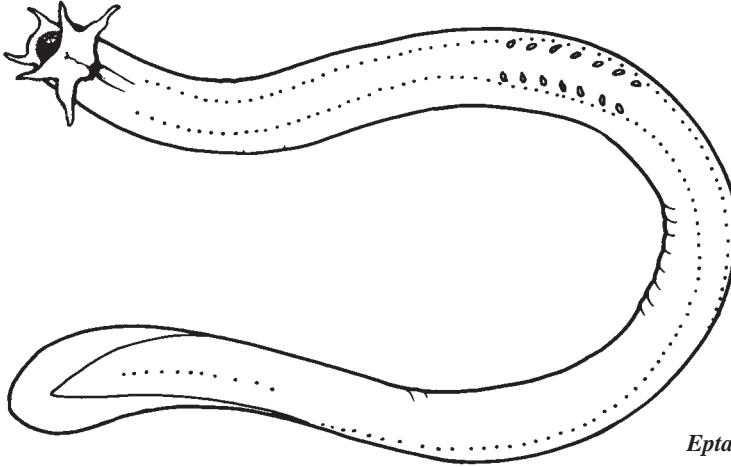
# HAGFISHES

by B. Fernholm and J.R. Paxton

## MYXINIDAE

### Hagfishes

**Diagnostic characters:** Moderate-sized to large (to 100 cm), very elongate with eel-shaped body. Mouth with laterally biting horny teeth; no jaws. Eye reduced. Anterior single nostril surrounded by 4 tentacles. No operculum; 1 to 16 pairs of external gill openings. Two ventrolateral rows of slime glands. No paired fins; median fins without rays. No scales. Skeleton cartilaginous. **Colour:** pink to brown.



*Eptatretus cirrhatus*

**Habitat, biology, and fisheries:** Benthic fishes, often burrowing in mud, from inshore to deepsea. Feed as scavengers, mostly on dead or disabled fishes. Rare to common, most efficiently taken in baited traps, of recent commercial interest for skin (eelskin) industry based in Korea.

**Remarks:** Six genera with about 60 species throughout the world's oceans in tropical and temperate latitudes; tropical species occur in deep water. A revision of the family is needed; the best recent overview is that of Fernholm (1998).

#### Similar families occurring in the area

None. The laterally biting horny teeth, the separate external gill openings, and the absence of fins with rays are not found, either singly or in combination, in any other fish in the area.

#### List of species occurring in the area

*Eptatretus carlhubbsi* McMillan and Wisner, 1984

*Eptatretus cirrhatus* (Forster, 1801)

*Eptatretus strahani* McMillan and Wisner, 1984

*Eptatretus* spp. nov. (to be described by Fernholm from Papua New Guinea and the Philippines)

#### Reference

Fernholm, B. 1998. Hagfish systematics. In *The biology of hagfishes*, edited by J.M. Jorgensen et al. London, Chapman and Hall, pp. 33-44.