

FAO SPECIES IDENTIFICATION SHEETS

FISHING AREA 51
(W. Indian Ocean)

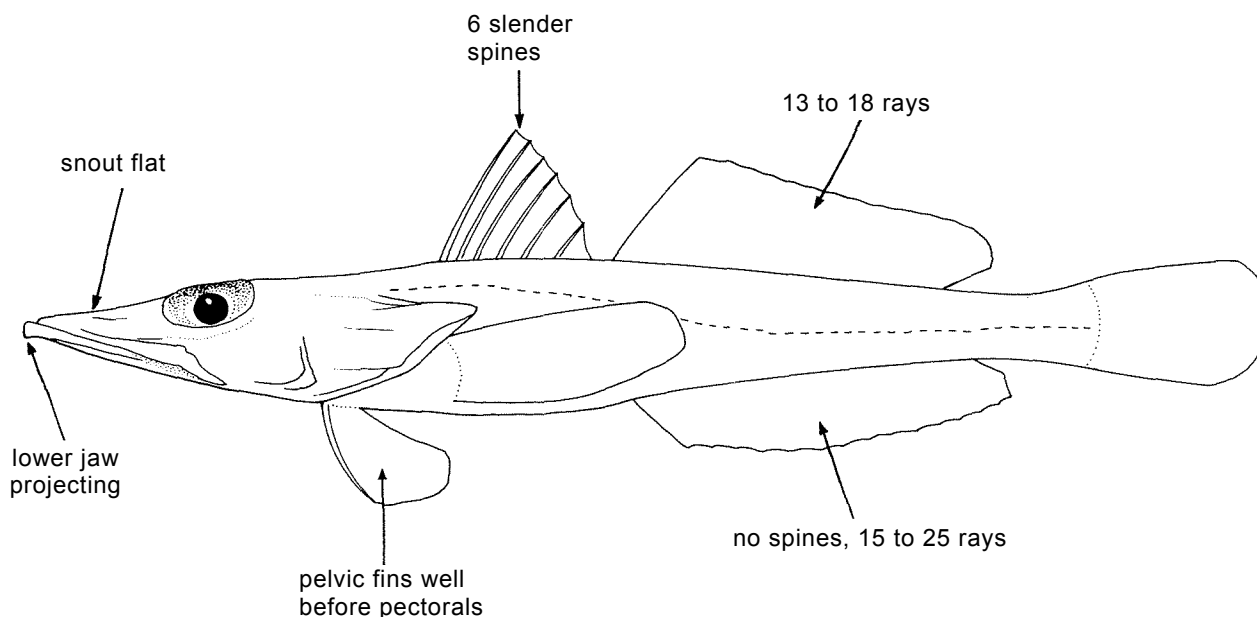
PERCOPHIDAE*

Duckbills

Elongate benthic fishes. Head depressed anteriorly, the snout flat and broad, resembling a duck's bill; mouth large, lower jaw projecting in front of upper; maxilla exposed; eyes large, the space between them very narrow; 2 spines on opercle, one on subopercle; minute conical teeth on jaws and roof of mouth (vomer and palatines). Two separate dorsal fins, the first with 6 slender spines and the second with 13 to 18 soft rays; pelvic fins with 1 weak spine and 5 branched rays, inserted well in advance of pectorals, their bases widely separated; anal fin lacking spines, with 15 to 25 soft rays; pectoral fins with 20 to 28 rays. Scales on body ctenoid rough; lateral line curves below first dorsal fin to below middle of side, the anteriormost 2 or 3 scales with a keel.

Colour: generally brownish; vague dusky blotches along body.

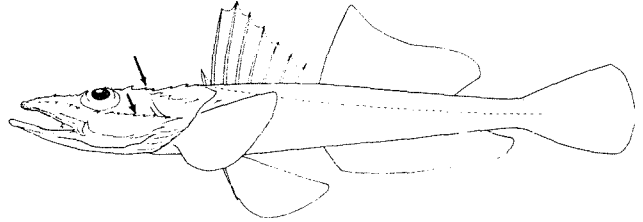
Bottom-living, carnivorous fishes occurring in depths of 100 to 600 m. Because of their small size and limited abundance, they are of no commercial importance.



*Family diagnosis applies only to Bembrops and Chronema

SIMILAR FAMILIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

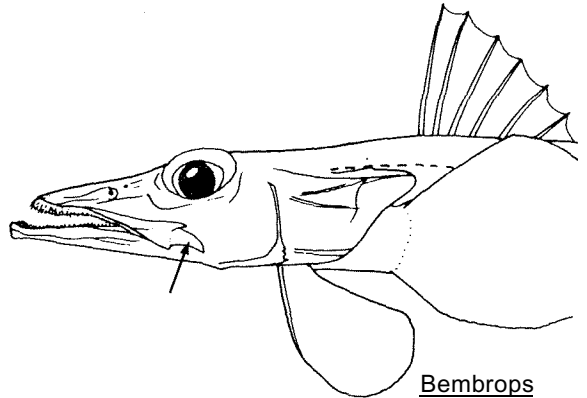
Platycephalidae (flatheads): numerous spines and bony ridges on head and 8 or 9 dorsal fin spines (6 dorsal fin spines in Percophidae).



Platycephalidae

KEY TO GENERA OCCURRING IN THE AREA*:

- 1a. Triangular flap of skin on rear end of maxilla Bembrops
- 1b. No flap on skin at end of maxilla Chrionema



Bembrops

LIST OF SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

(The genus Bembrops is in need of revision, and the synonymy given below is provisional. The names Bembrops caudimacula and B. caudimaculata have erroneously been applied to the species in the Western Indian Ocean. B. caudimacula (Steindachner, 1876) is a valid species known with certainty only from Japan.)

- Bembrops platyrhynchus (Alcock, 1893)
- = B. adenensis Norman, 1939
- = B. nematopterus Norman, 1939

- Chrionema chlorotaenia (McKay, 1971)
- = C. chryseres (non Gilbert): Talwar, 1974

Osopsaron natalensis Nelson, 1982

Pteropsaron heemstrai Nelson, 1982

Prepared by P.C. Heemstra, J.L.B. Smith Institute of Ichthyology, Grahamstown, South Africa, and J.S. Nelson, Department of Zoology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

*Osopsaron and Pteropsaron are represented in the Western Indian Ocean by 2 small species that are known only from off the coast of Natal, South Africa. They may be distinguished from Bembrops and Chrionema by the anteriorly-directed spine at the front end of the maxilla, lower jaw shorter than upper jaw, and only 1 spine on the opercle

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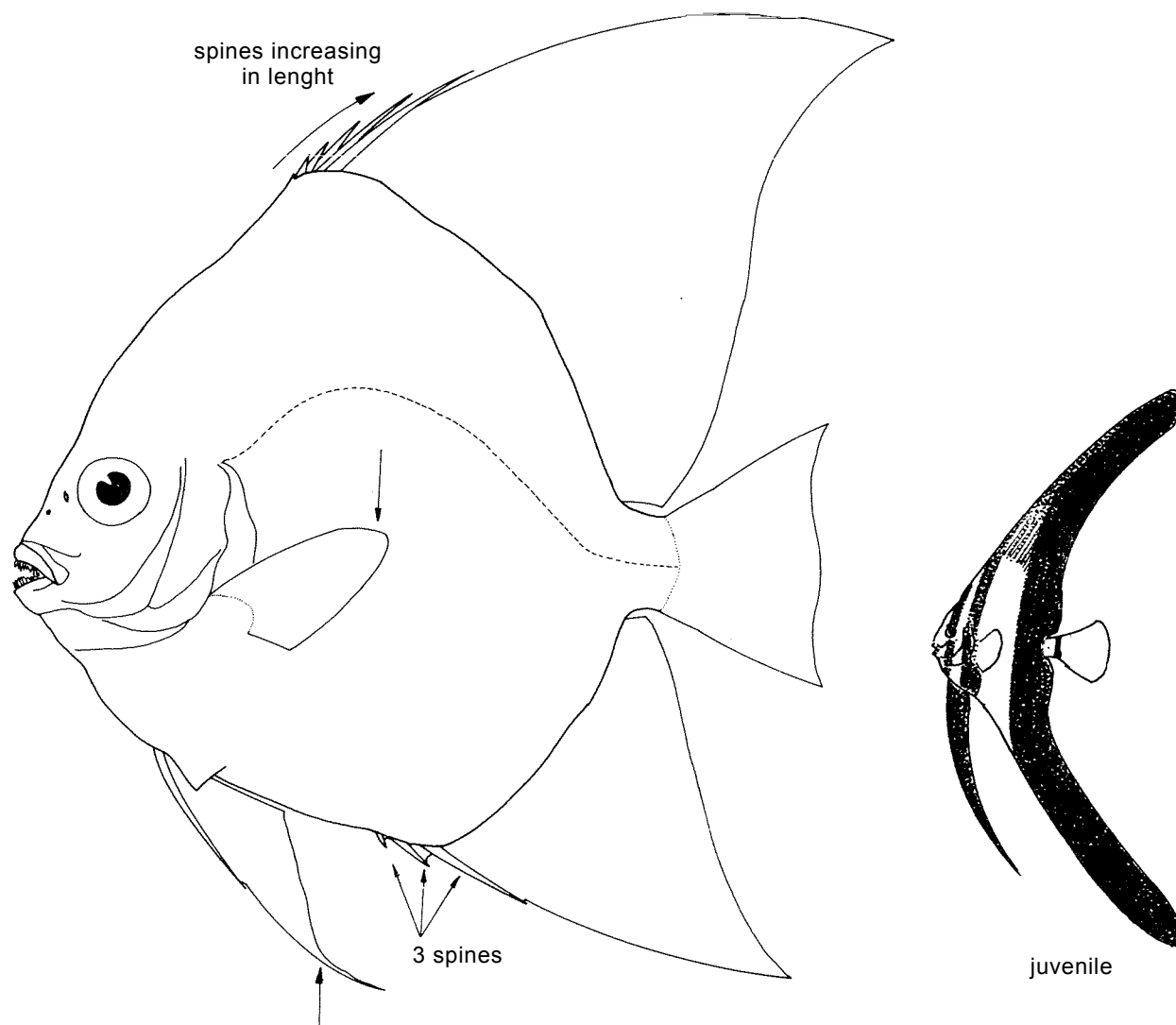
PLATACIDAE

Batfishes

(placed by some authors, together with the Drepanidae, in the family Ehippidae)

Body very deep, rhomboid and strongly compressed, much changing with age. Head much shorter than high, with front profile more or less parabolic; mouth small, horizontal, terminal, scarcely protractile; teeth more or less clearly tricuspid, disposed in brushlike bands in each jaw; roof of mouth usually toothless. A single, unnotched dorsal fin, decreasing in size with age; spinous part poorly differentiated, with 3 to 9 spines, increasing in size posteriorly and nearly concealed by the scaly covering of the fin; 23 to 40 soft rays; anal fin with 3 spines and 22 to 30 soft rays; pectoral fins short, rounded; pelvic fins present, greatly produced, becoming shorter with age. Lateral line arched, about concurrent with back. Scales small, finely ciliated, becoming minute on head and vertical fins.

Colour: juveniles: nearly completely black, fringed with orange-red. Subadults and adults: silvery grey with blackish vertical bars, the first through eye, fading with age.

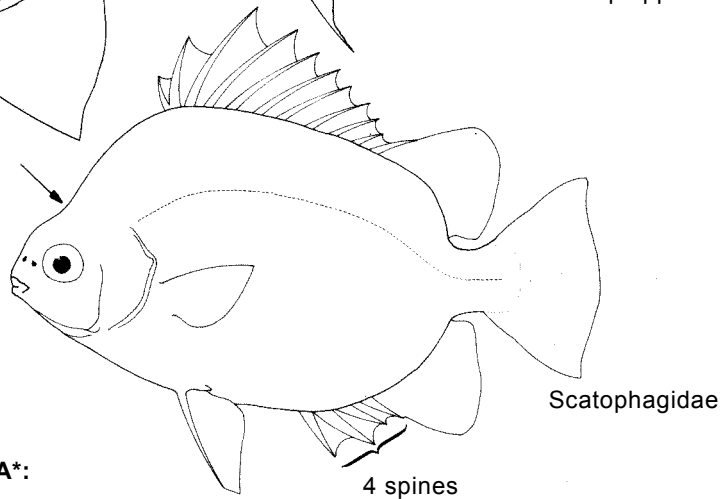
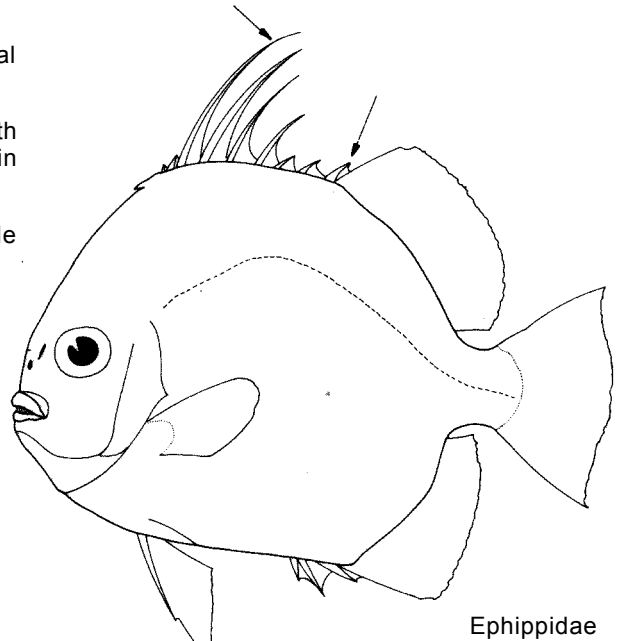
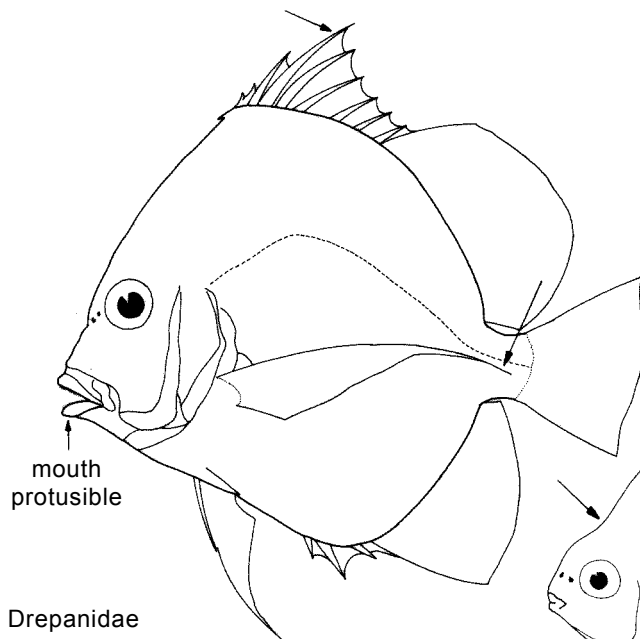


SIMILAR FAMILIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

Ehippidae: dorsal fin with a deep notch; dorsal spines produced.

Drepanidae: pectoral fins long and falcate; mouth protrusible forming a downward-pointing tube; dorsal fin spines shorter and stouter.

Scatophagidae: 4 anal spines and snout profile concave.



KEY TO GENERA OCCURRING IN THE AREA*:

Platax only.

KEY TO SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

- 1a. Lateral line with 60 to 65 scales..... Platax pinnatus
- 1b. Lateral line with 50 to 55 scales..... Platax orbicularis

*Species poorly distinct

LIST OF SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

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

Platax orbicularis Forsskål, 1775

PLATAC Plat 1

Platax innatus (Linnaeus, 1758)

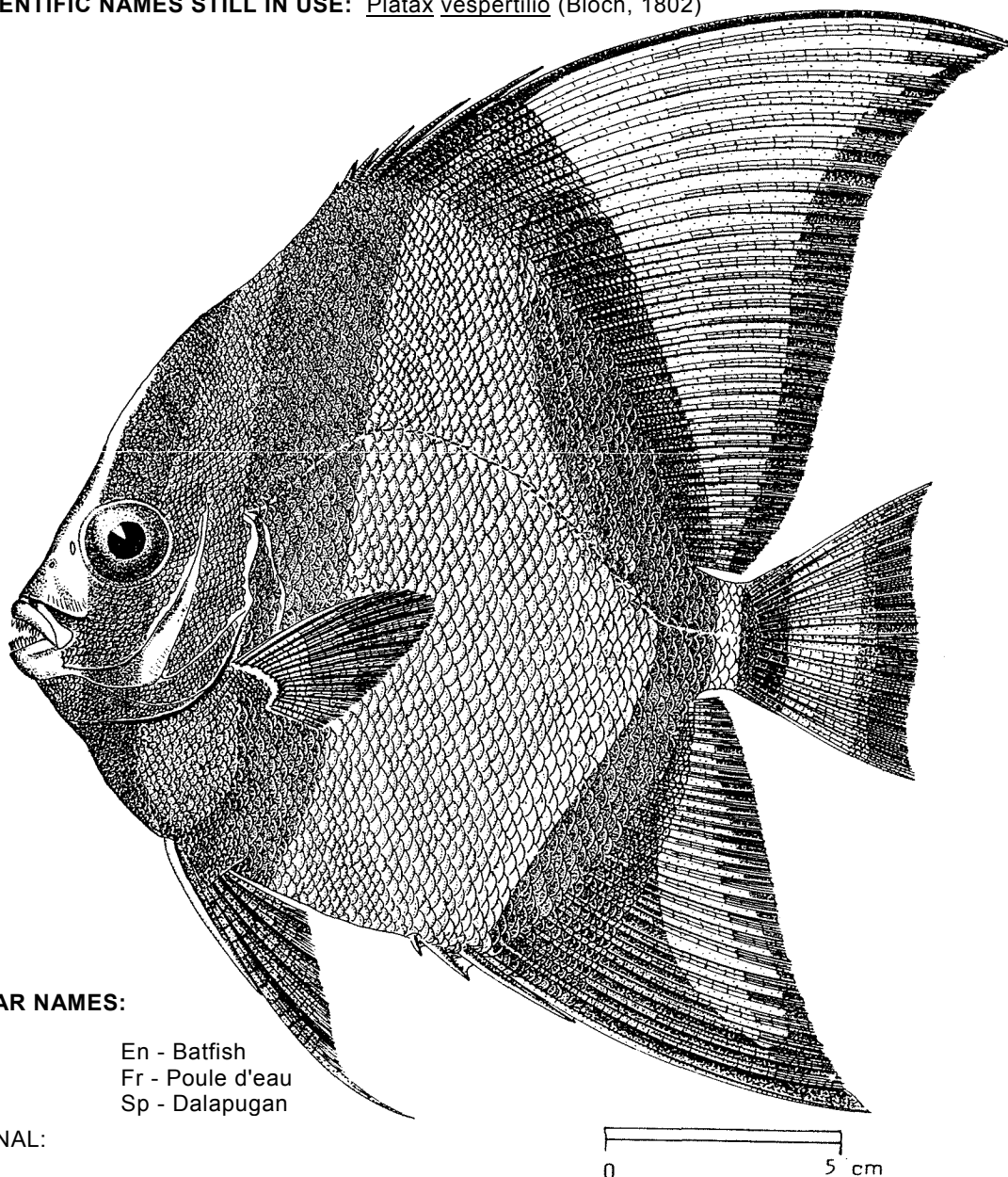
Prepared by A. Maugé, Ichtyologie Générale et Appliquée, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 43 rue Cuvier, 75231 Paris, Cedex 05, France

Revised by P.C. Heemstra, J.L.B. Museum of Ichthyology, Grahamstown, South Africa

Illustrations provided by author

FAO SPECIES IDENTIFICATION SHEETS

FAMILY: PLATACIDAE

FISHING AREA 51
(W. Indian Ocean)*Platax orbicularis* (Forsskål, 1775)OTHER SCIENTIFIC NAMES STILL IN USE: *Platax vespertilio* (Bloch, 1802)

VERNACULAR NAMES:

FAO: En - Batfish
 Fr - Poule d'eau
 Sp - Dalapugan

NATIONAL:

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERS:

Body deep, rhomboid, strongly compressed. Forehead profile somewhat angular; teeth tricuspid, movable, in brushlike bands in each jaw; median cusp of each tooth prominently stronger. Dorsal fin with 5 concealed spines and 36 or 37 soft rays; anal fin with 3 spines and 25 to 27 soft rays; pectoral fins short and rounded; pelvic fins produced. Lateral line arched, with 50 to 55 scales. Scales finely ciliated, small, becoming minute on fins which are densely covered.

Colour: adults silvery grey with blackish vertical bars fading with age.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS OF SIMILAR SPECIES OCCURRING IN THE AREA:

Platax pinnatus: 60 or more scales in lateral line (50 to 55 in P. orbicularis).

Species of Ehippidae: dorsal fin with prominent spines, produced; a deep notch separating spinous part from soft part.

Species of Drepanidae: dorsal fin with 8 to 10 spines which are shorter and stouter (5 spines in P. orbicularis); pectoral fins long, falcate, mouth protrusible, forming a downward-pointing tube when protruded.

Scatophagidae: 4 anal fin spines (3 in P. orbicularis); snout profile concave.

SIZE:

Maximum: 50 cm; common to 25 cm.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND BEHAVIOUR:

From the Red Sea and east coast of Africa (southward to Port Elisabeth) across the Western Indian Ocean to the coasts of Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka. Outside the area, extending eastward through the Eastern Indian Ocean/Western Central Pacific to China and Queensland (Australia).

Lives on coral reefs, in bays and along rocky shores, juveniles occurring Occasionally in brackish waters. juveniles often floating motionless on the water surface.

PRESENT FISHING GROUNDS:

Throughout its range, but nowhere abundant.

CATCHES, FISHING GEAR AND FORMS OF UTILIZATION:

Separate statistics are not reported for this species.

Caught mainly with handlines and nets.

Edible and even palatable, but poorly favoured as food on account of their foul feeding habits. Feebly marketed.

