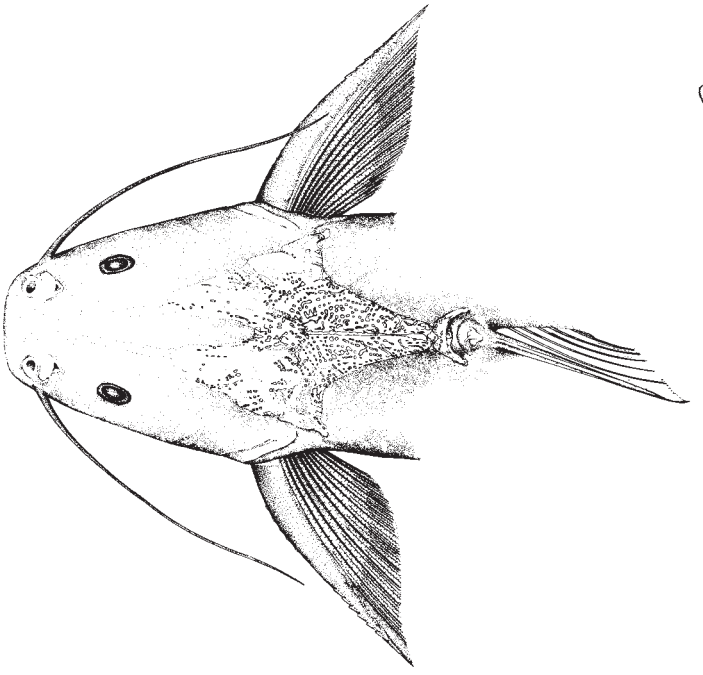
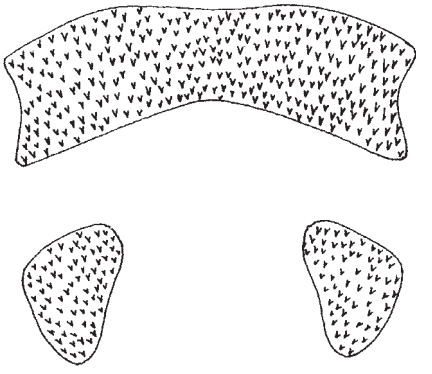
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Arius rugispinis Valenciennes, 1840

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: *Arius rugispinnis* Valenciennes, 1840; *Hexanematichthys rugispinis* (Valenciennes, 1840); *Tachysurus atroplumbeus* Fowler, 1931 / None.

FAO names: En - Softhead sea catfish; **Fr** - Mâchoiron petit-gueule; **Sp** - Bagre tumbeló.



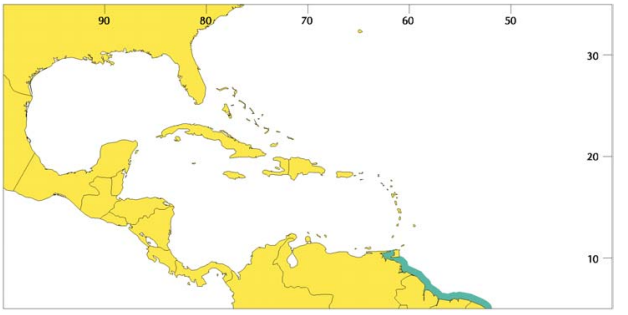


premaxillary and palatine tooth patches

Diagnostic characters: Head flattened above; exposed head shield well visible, **rugose, short, not extending forward to eyes, its supraoccipital process long, moderately narrow, and tapering posteriorly; predorsal plate short, crescent-shaped**. Snout long, rounded transversely. Mouth inferior. **Teeth on palate villiform in 2 small rounded to elliptical patches widely separated from each other**. Three pairs of barbels (1 maxillary and 2 mental) around mouth, the maxillary barbels reaching to pectoral fins. **No gill rakers on rear surfaces of first 2 arches; total number of anterior gill rakers on first arch 14 to 17; anterior gill rakers on second arch 16 to 20**. Dorsal fin with a strong, serrated, erectile spine. A large well-developed adipose fin present. Pectoral fins with a strong, serrated, erectile spine; soft rays in pectoral fins 11 or 12. **Number of vertebrae free from Weberian complex 48 to 51. Colour:** grey to reddish brown above, lighter below.

Size: Maximum 45 cm; common to 30 cm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Found chiefly in turbid waters of estuaries and in coastal waters around river mouths. Feeds heavily on crabs, amphipods, and shrimps; gonads develop at sizes of 12 cm or less; 54 eggs, each 10 mm in a 27 cm female; in eastern Venezuela reproduction seems to occur during the dry season. Separate statistics are not reported for this species; caught mainly with beach seines and Chinese trap nets, occasionally as bycatch in industrial trawl fisheries for shrimp; an important fishery resource, marketed fresh and salted, and exported frozen.

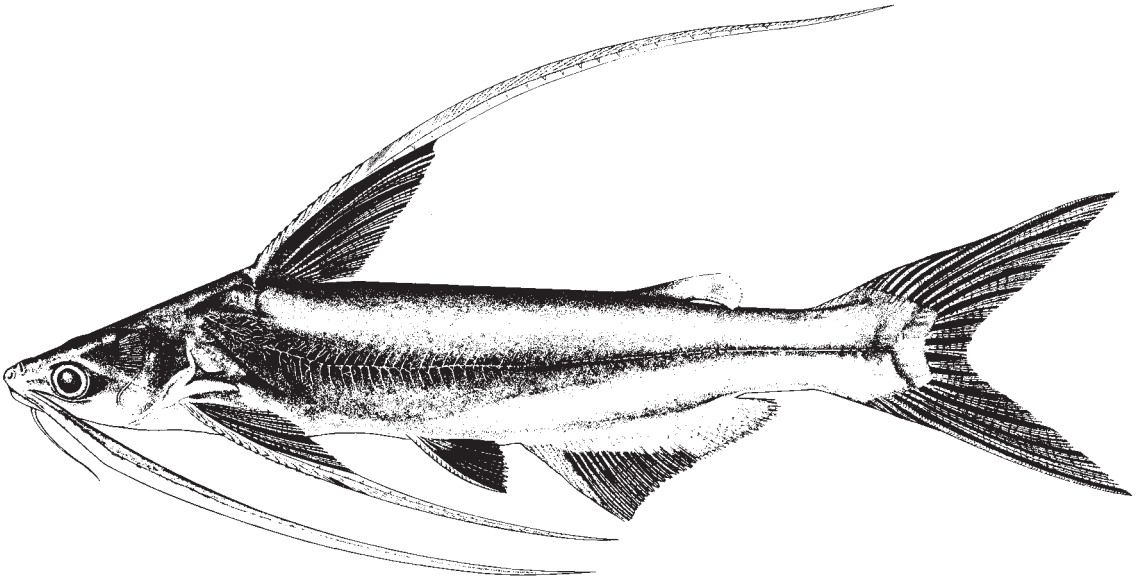


Distribution: From the Gulf of Paria (Venezuela) to the mouth of the Amazon River (Brazil).

Bagre bagre (Linnaeus, 1766) BEB

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: *Felichthys bagre* (Linnaeus, 1766) / None.

FAO names: En - Coco sea catfish; **Fr** - Mâchoiron coco; **Sp** - Bagre doncella.

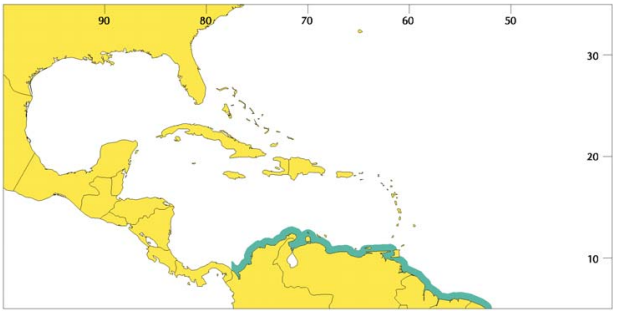


Diagnostic characters: Head arched, little depressed; bony shield on head nearly obscured, its supraoccipital process relatively narrow, tapering slightly backward to meet the crescent-shaped predorsal plate. Snout rounded transversely. Mouth slightly inferior. Teeth on palate in 4 patches, forming a transverse arc, each patch wider than long. **Two pairs (1 maxillary and 1 mental) of barbels around mouth; maxillary barbels and filaments of dorsal- and pectoral-fin spines flattened, ribbon-like, reaching to or beyond anal fin**. Dorsal fin with a serrated, erectile spine. A well-developed adipose fin present. **Anal fin long, with 29 to 37 soft rays**. Pectoral fins with a serrated, erectile spine. **Colour:** silvery grey to bluish grey above, lighter below; a large black spot usually present on anterior anal-fin rays.

Size: Maximum 55 cm; common to 40 cm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: An almost entirely marine species, common around river mouths to depths of 50 m, usually less; also entering river estuaries. Feeds on small fishes and invertebrates, such as small crustaceans and polychaetes. Separate statistics are not reported for this species; caught mainly with shore seines, cast nets, traps, and on hook-and-line, also taken as bycatch in industrial trawl fishery for shrimps; marketed mostly fresh.

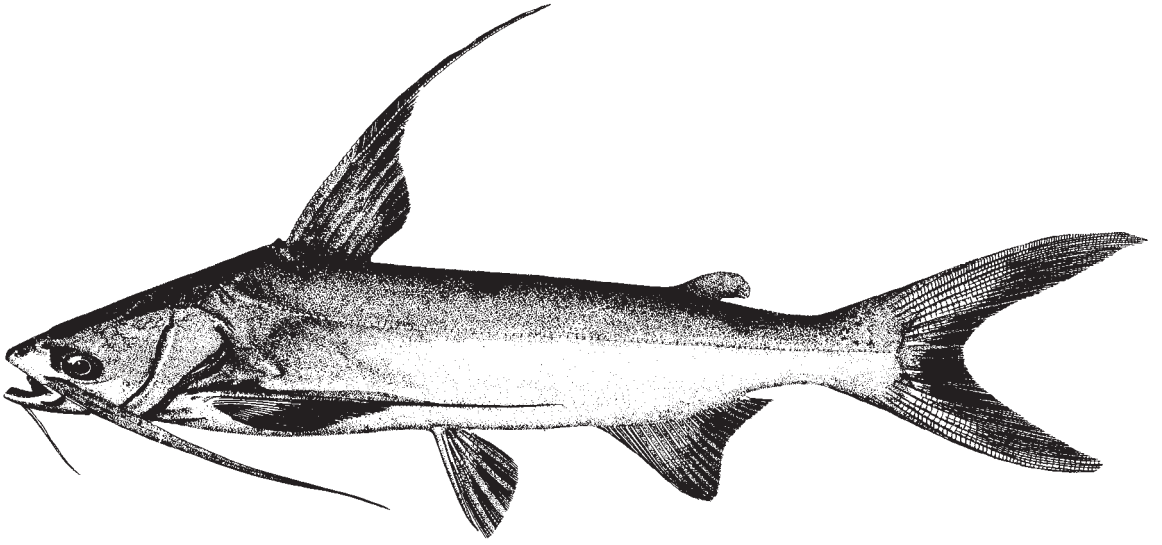
Distribution: From Colombia to Brazil.



Bagre marinus (Mitchill, 1815) BEM

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / *Bagre felis* (Meek and Hildebrand, 1923); *Felichthys felis* Meek and Hildebrand, 1923; *Felichthys marinus* (Mitchill, 1815).

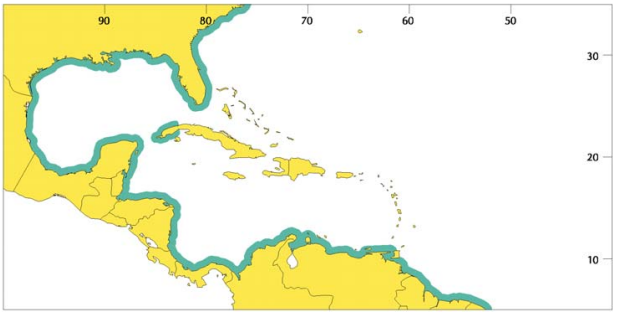
FAO names:En - Gafftopsail sea catfish; **Fr** - Mâchoiron antenne; **Sp** - Bagre cacumo.



Diagnostic characters: Head arched, little depressed; bony shield on head nearly obscured, its supraoccipital process relatively narrow, tapering slightly backward to meet the crescent-shaped predorsal plate. Snout moderately long and rounded transversely. Mouth slightly inferior. Teeth on palate in 4 patches forming a transverse arc, each patch wider than long. **Two pairs (1 maxillary and 1 mental) of barbels around mouth; maxillary barbels and filaments of dorsal- and pectoral-fin spines flattened, ribbon-like, and long, but maxillary barbel not reaching to anal fin.** Dorsal fin with a serrated, erectile spine. A well-developed adipose fin present. **Anal fin short, with 22 to 28 soft rays**. Pectoral fins with a serrated, erectile spine. **Colour:** bluish grey to dark brown above, lighter below.

Size: Maximum reportedly to 100 cm; common to 50 cm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: A predominantly marine species found to depths of 50 m, usually less; said to be common in estuaries and in mangrove-lined lagoons of relatively high salinity. Feeds chiefly on small fishes and invertebrates; spawning takes places from May to August in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Separate statistics are not reported for this species; caught mainly with longlines (large specimens), shore seines, cast nets, and on hook-and-line, also taken as bycatch in industrial trawl fisheries for shrimp; marketed mostly fresh.

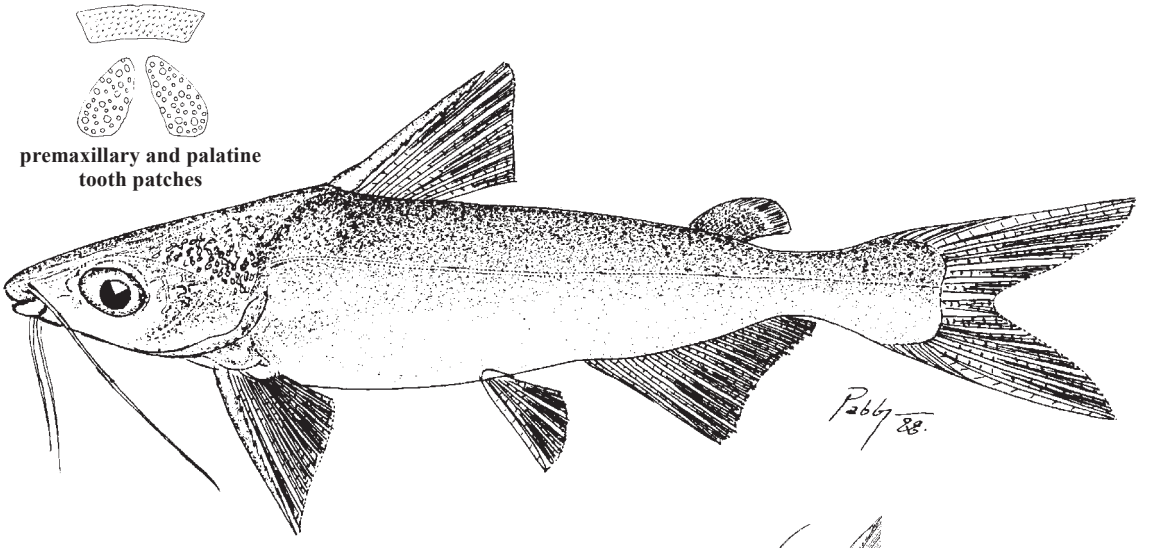


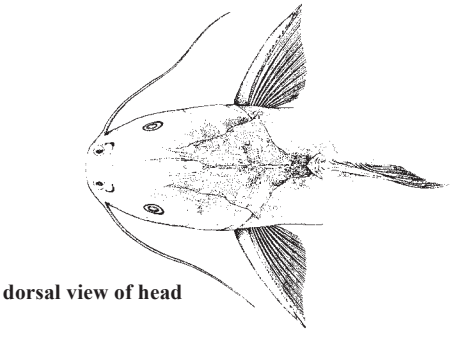
Distribution: Along the American Atlantic coast from Cape Cod to Brazil, including the Gulf of Mexico and the continental coast of the Caribbean Sea; also reported from western Cuba.

Cathorops spixii (Agassiz, 1829)

Frequent synonyms/misidentifications: *Arius spixii* (Agassiz, 1829); *Arius fissus* Valenciennes, 1840 / None.

FAO names: En - Madamango sea catfish; **Fr** - Mâchoiron madamango; **Sp** - Bagre cuinche.

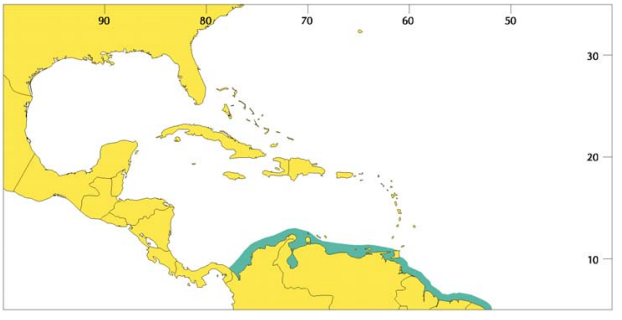




Diagnostic characters: Head rounded, moderately flattened above; exposed head shield well visible, rugose, **not or barely extending anteriorly to opposite rear margin of eyes; its supraoccipital process broad at base, narrow and truncated posteriorly, with a slight median keel; predorsal plate small, crescent-shaped**; usually a shallow fleshy groove in median depression of head extending anteriorly from the rugose head shield, and often a small median pit or short groove on snout. Snout rounded transversely. Mouth inferior. **Teeth on palate mostly molariform, in a single small oblique patch on each side, the patches always separate**. Three pairs of barbels (one maxillary and two mental) around mouth; the maxillary barbels passing the pectoral-fin bases. **Prominent numerous gill rakers regularly spaced on both anterior and posterior surfaces of first two arches**; total number of anterior gill rakers on first arch 17 to 22. Dorsal fin with a strong, serrated, erectile spine. A well-developed adipose fin present. Anal fin with 22 to 25 soft rays. Pectoral fins with a strong, serrated, erectile spine; soft rays in pectoral fin 10. **Colour:** dark brown to bluish black above, much paler to whitish below.

Size: Maximum about 30 cm; common to 20 cm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Occurs in shallow coastal marine waters and brackish estuaries, lagoons, and river mouths. Feeds mainly on invertebrates and small fishes; detritus and filamentous algae have also been found in the stomachs. Separate statistics are not reported for this species. Caught mainly with bottom trawls, shore seines, and on hook-and-line. Although a small species, it may appear in markets for local consumption.

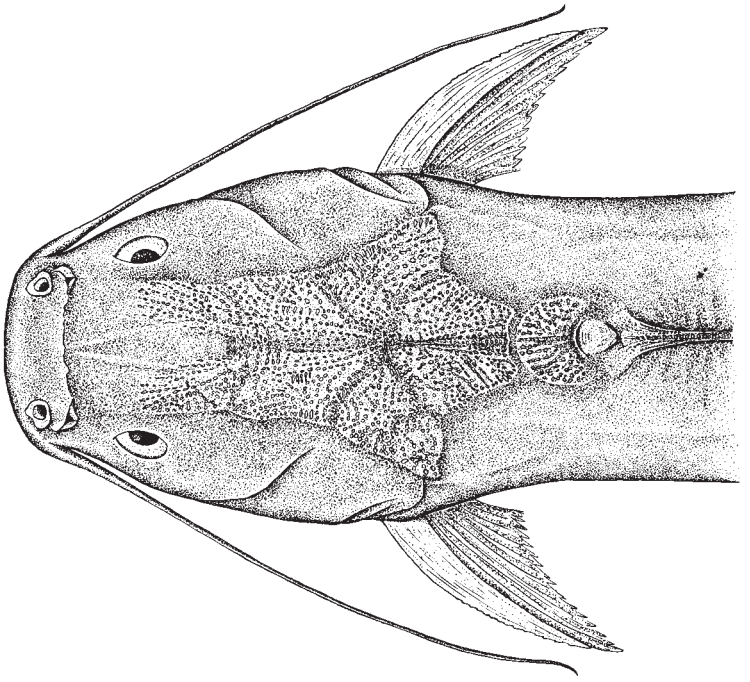


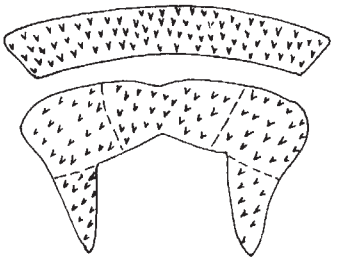
Distribution: From Colombia to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Selenaspis couma (Valenciennes, 1840)

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: *Arius couma* Valenciennes, 1840; *Sciadeichthys walcrechti* Boeseman, 1954 / *Selenaspis herzbergii* (Bloch, 1794).

FAO names: En - Couma sea catfish; **Fr** - Mâchoiron couma; **Sp** - Bagre cuma.





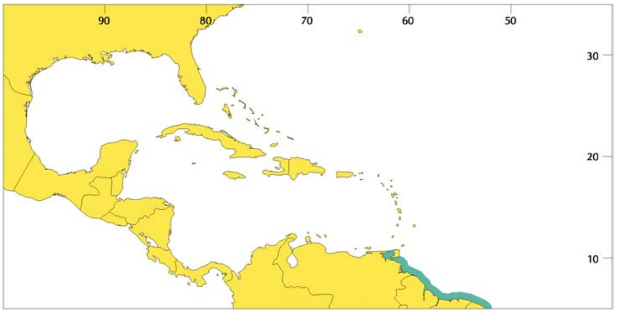
premaxillary and palatine tooth patches

Diagnostic characters: Head rounded and only slightly flattened above; exposed head shield well visible, very rugose and extending forward to opposite eyes, its **supraoccipital process rugose, rounded above, without a definite median keel**, moderately broad at base, tapering and much narrower posteriorly to meet the rugose, **subshield-shaped predorsal plate. Snout broadly rounded transversely; posterior nostrils connected by a narrow furrow partially covered by a flap of skin. Mouth slightly inferior. Teeth villiform and nearly granular, those on palate forming a U-shaped patch, the posterior extensions of which are not evident in young individuals**. Three pairs of barbels (1 maxillary and 2 mental) around mouth, the maxillary barbels reaching to pectoral fins. No gill rakers on rear surfaces of first 2 arches; **total number of anterior gill rakers on second arch 17 to 21**. Dorsal fin with a strong, serrated, erectile spine. A well-developed adipose fin present. Pectoral fins with a strong, serrated, erectile spine; **soft pectoral-fin rays usually 11. Colour:** yellowish grey to dark greyish brown above, whitish below.

Size: Maximum at least 100 cm; common to 50 cm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Confined chiefly to turbid waters in estuaries and the lower parts of rivers. Separate statistics are not reported for this species; caught mainly with shore seines, gill nets, cast nets, trawls, traps, hook-and-line, and longlines; an important food fish, marketed mostly fresh and salted.

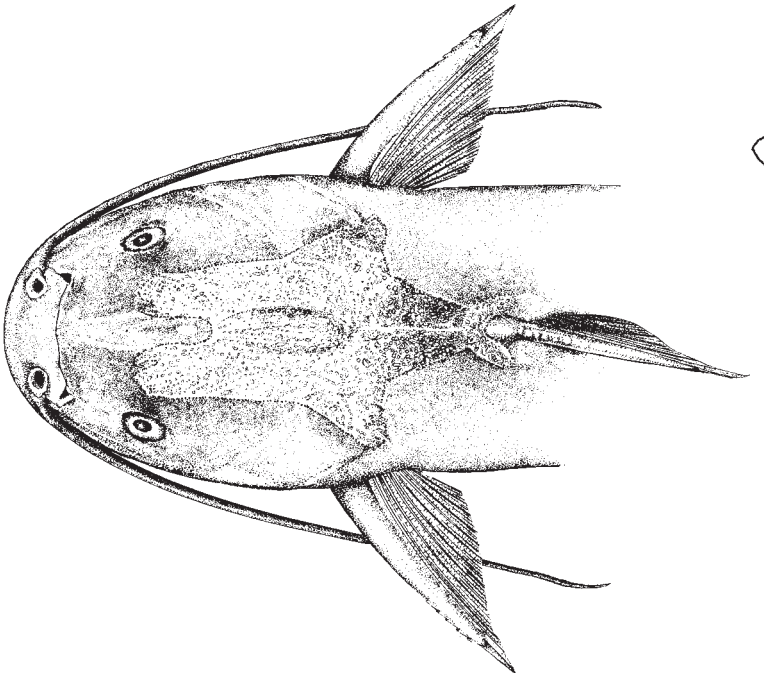
Distribution: From the Gulf of Paria (Venezuela) to the mouth of the Amazon River (Brazil).

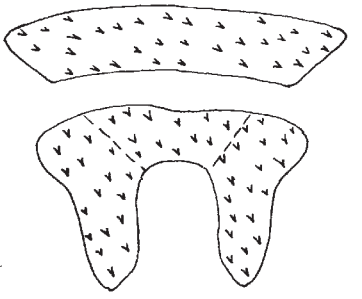


Selenaspis herzbergii (Bloch, 1794) SSZ

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: *Arius herzbergii* (Bloch, 1794) / None.

FAO names: En - Pemecou sea catfish; **Fr** - Mâchoiron pémécou; **Sp** - Bagre guatero.



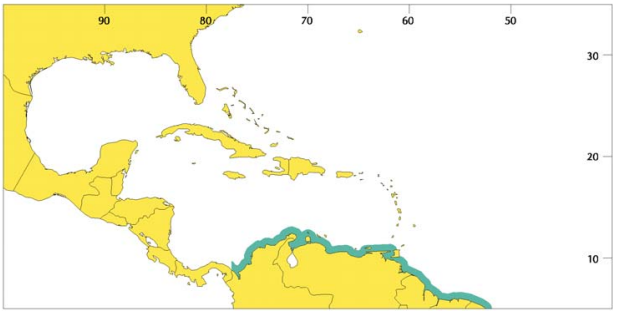


premaxillary and palatine tooth patches

Diagnostic characters: Head rounded and only sligthly flattened above; exposed bony head shield well visible, very rugose and extending forward to opposite eyes, **its supraoccipital process slightly keeled**, moderately broad at base, tapering and much narrower posteriorly to meet the rather short, crescent-shaped predorsal plate. **Snout rounded transversely; posterior nostrils connected by a narrow, shallow furrow or depression partially covered by a flap of skin. Mouth slightly inferior. Teeth villiform and nearly granular, those on palate forming a U-shaped patch**. Three pairs of barbels (1 maxillary and 2 mental) around mouth, the maxillary barbels reaching to slightly beyond pectoral fins. Sometimes a few tiny gill rakers on rear surfaces of first 2 arches, chiefly confined to upper limb of each arch; **total number of anterior gill rakers on second arch 19 to 26**. Dorsal fin with a strong, serrated, erectile spine. A well-developed adipose fin present. Pectoral fins with a strong, serrated, erectile spine; **soft rays in pectoral fins usually 10 or 11. Colour:** grey to dark brown above, whitish below.

Size: Maximum about 55 cm; common to 40 cm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Found commonly in turbid estuaries, mangrove-lined lagoons, and lower parts of rivers; very tolerant of changes in salinity, also occuring in hypersaline waters and occasionally shallow marine waters. Feeds on a large variety of bottom living and pelagic organisms (i.e., fishes, worms, crustaceans) including those found among the roots of mangroves. Separate statistics are not reported for this species; caught mainly with bottom trawls, beach nets, cast nets, seines, and traps; marketed mostly fresh.

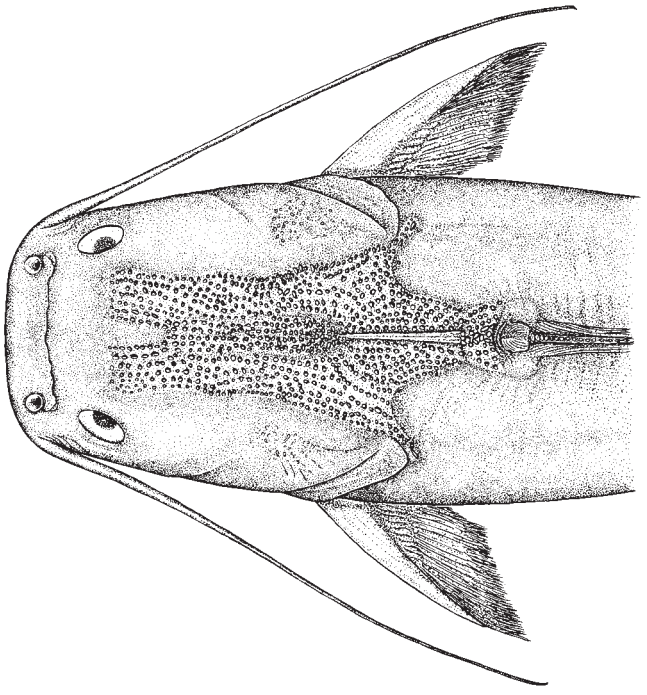


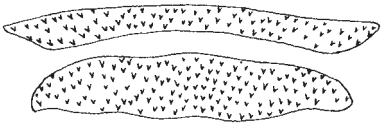
Distribution: Northern coast of South America from Colombia to Brazil.

Selenaspis passany (Valenciennes, 1840)

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: *Arius passany* (Valenciennes, 1840) / None.

FAO names: En - Passany sea catfish; **Fr** - Mâchoiron passany; **Sp** - Bagre chato.





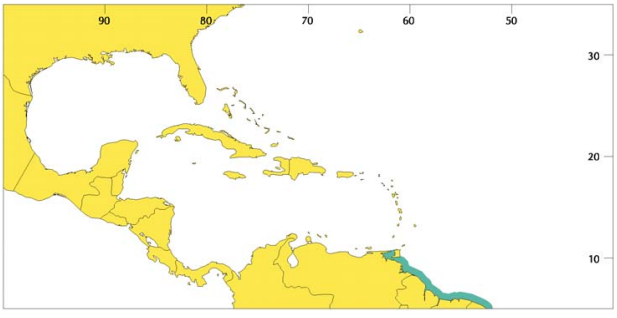
premaxillary and palatine tooth patches

Diagnostic characters: Head flattened above; exposed bony head shield well visible, very rugose, and extending forward to opposite eyes, **its supraoccipital process slightly keeled**, moderately long, broad, and tapering posteriorly to meet the large, rugose predorsal plate. **Snout short and broad, truncated transversely; posterior nostrils connected by a narrow, shallow furrow or depression partially covered by flaps of skin. Mouth terminal, the lower jaw equal to, or slightly longer than, upper jaw**. **Teeth villiform or nearly granulate, those on palate forming a narrow, almost straight, and irregular-edged transverse band**. Three pairs of barbels (1 maxillary and 2 mental) around mouth, the maxillary barbels reaching to pectoral fins. No gill rakers on rear surfaces of first 2 arches; anterior gill rakers (total number) on first arch 19 to 21. Dorsal fin with a strong, serrated, erectile spine. A well-developed adipose fin present. Pectoral fins with a strong, serrated, erectile spine; **soft rays in pectoral fins 11 or 12. Colour:** grey to dark brown or blackish above; lighter below

Size: Maximum over 100 cm; common to 50 cm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Commonly found in coastal waters and river estuaries. Separate statistics are not reported for this species; caught mainly with gill nets, beach seines, hook-and-line, and longlines; marketed fresh and salted.

Distribution: From the Gulf of Paria (Venezuela) to the mouth of the Amazon River (Brazil).



AUCHENIPTERIDAE

Driftwood catfishes

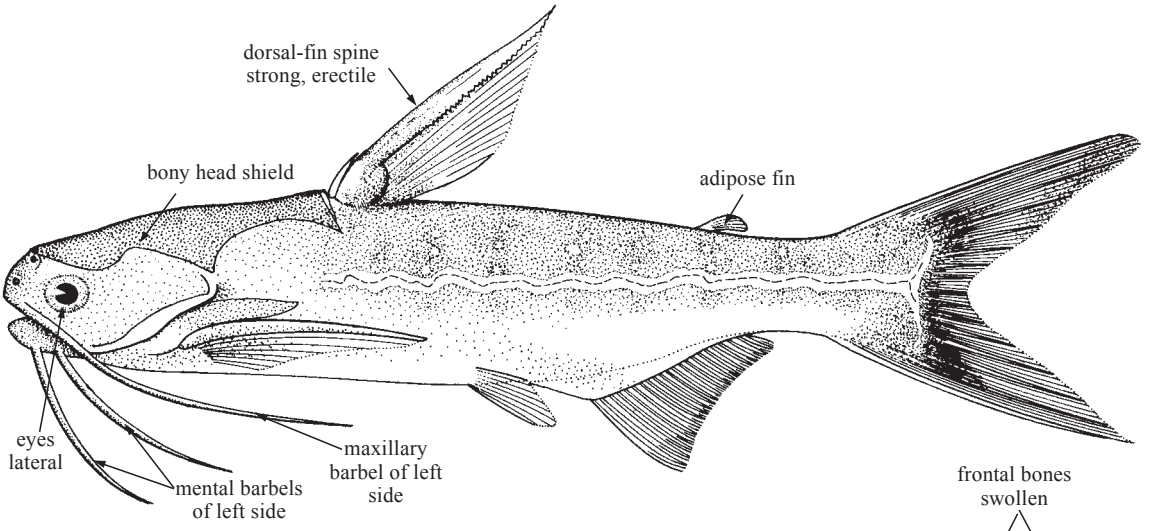
by C.J. Ferraris, Jr., Portland, Oregon, USA (after Taylor and Roberts, 1977)

A single species occurring in the area.

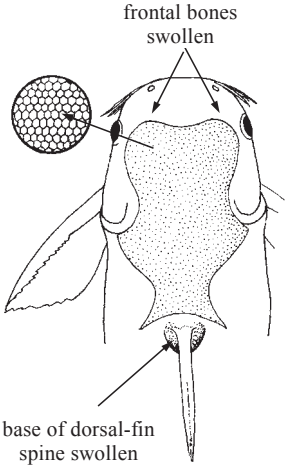
Pseudauchenipterus nodosus (Bloch, 1794)

Frequent synonyms / misidentifications: None / None.

FAO names: En - Cocosoda catfish; **Fr** - Cocosoda kakinette; **Sp** - Bagre patriota.

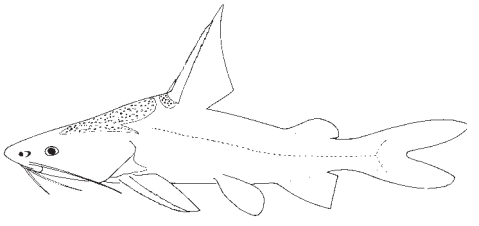


Diagnostic characters: Medium-sized fish, to 30 cm total length; body terete, slightly compressed posteriorly. Head rounded, nearly as broad as long; eyes laterally placed; **snout blunt; anterior and posterior nostrils separated by distance greater than nostril diameter; palate toothless; bony head shield with honeycomb-like pattern; frontal bones swollen in adults and larger juveniles; maxillary barbel not reaching to pectoral-fin spine tip**; 2 pairs of mental barbels, nasal barbel absent. **Dorsal-fin spine strong and serrated, its base swollen in adults**; caudal fin deeply forked. **Colour:** back bluish grey, sides and fins yellow or orange; several vertical rows of small white spots on body; underside of head and belly silvery with a rosy tinge; lateral line blue and conspicuous, edged above and below by an undulating white streak; caudal fin with a dusky posterior margin.



Similar families occurring in the area

Ariidae: dorsal-fin spine not swollen basally; anterior and posterior nostrils close together; lateral line not conspicuous and wavy; dorsal head shield surface smooth or rough, but no honeycomb-like texture; palate with teeth.

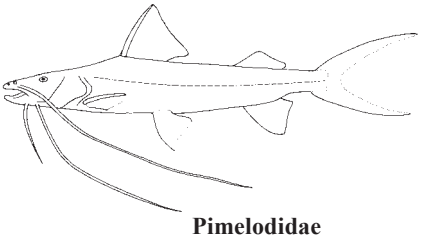


Ariidae

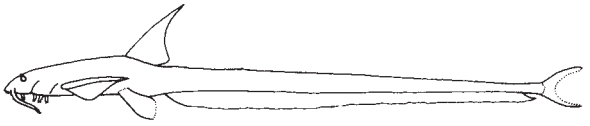
Pimelodidae: maxillary barbel extends past pectoral-fin spine; base of dorsal-fin spine not swollen basally; lateral line not prominant or wavy.

Aspredinidae: body compressed anteriorly, whip-like posteriorly; no adipose fin; eyes minute; anal-fin base long; gill opening restricted.

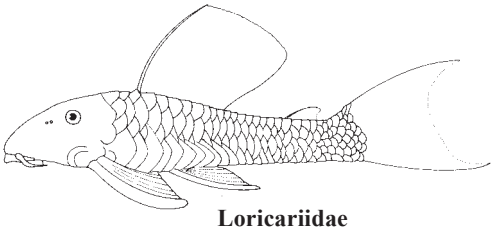
Loricariidae: body covered with bony plates; no barbels on ventral surface of head.



Pimelodidae



Aspredinidae

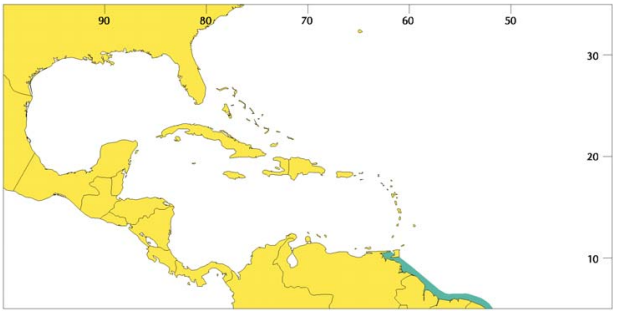


Loricariidae

Size: Maximum: at least to 30 cm total length; commonly to 25 cm.

Habitat, biology, and fisheries: Moderately common over muddy bottoms in brackish river mouths and in freshened sea water, especially during the rainy season. Reproduction takes place in December. Caught mainly in Chinese seines along with *Hypophthalmus* in French Guiana. Marketed mostly fresh; but flesh apparently not highly esteemed; often used for bait.

Distribution: Along the coast from the Gulf of Paria, Venezuela, and Trinidad to northern Brazil.



References

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Puyo, J. 1949. *Poissons de la Guyane Française.* Paris, Office de la Recherche Scientifique Outre-Mer, 280 p.

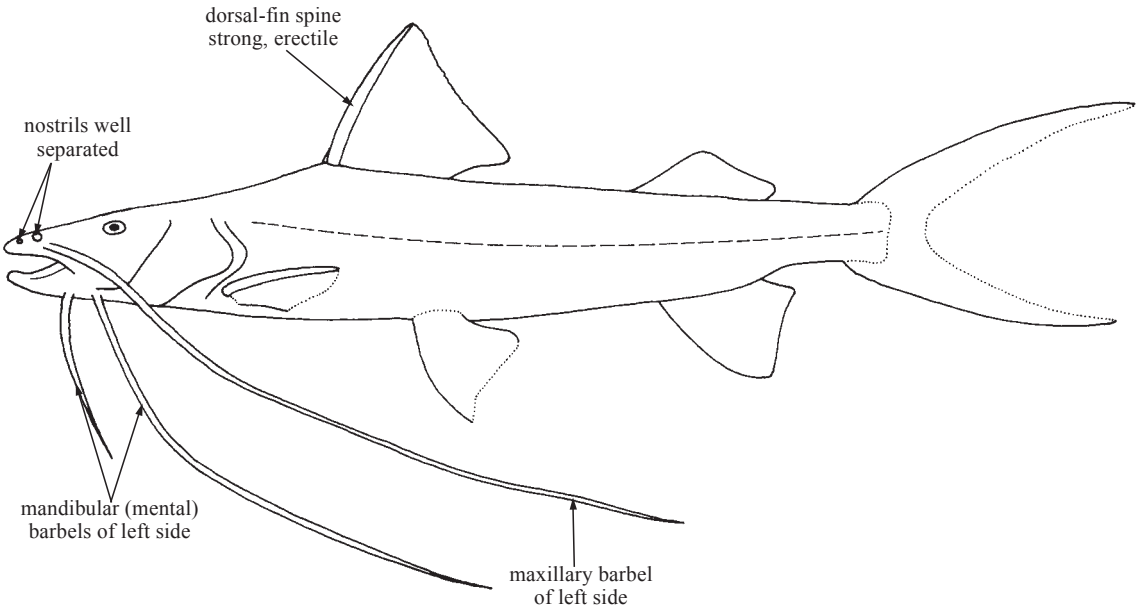
Taylor, W.R. and T.R. Roberts. 1977. *Auchenipteridae.* In FAO Species Identification Sheets. Western Central Atlantic (Fishing Area 31), edited by W. Fischer. Vol. 1. Rome, FAO (unpaginated).

PIMELODIDAE

Long-whiskered catfishes

by C.J. Ferraris, Jr., Portland, Oregon, USA (after Taylor and Roberts, 1977)

Diagnostic characters: Medium to large-sized fishes (to over 200 cm); body elongate. Snout and head rounded to depressed; **anterior and posterior nostrils separated by space greater than nostril diameter, posterior nostril without flap along its anterior margin**. Mouth terminal to inferior. Teeth usually present in jaws and on palate (absent in *Hypophthalmus*). Head covered by strong bony shield which may be visible beneath thin skin. Gill membranes free from isthmus. Maxillary barbel and 2 pairs of mental barbels present, nasal barbel absent. Dorsal-fin base short, consisting of short spine followed by longer, more or less pungent spine which can be locked into erect position and several soft rays. Adipose fin present, variable in size; pectoral fin very low-set, close to ventral profile, with a more or less serrated spine which, like the dorsal spine, can be locked into erect position. Scales absent. Lateral line complete. **Colour:** usually grey-blue, dark grey or dark brown on back and sides, paler to white below; spots, blotches or cross bars present in some species.



Habitat, biology, and fisheries: The Pimelodidae form one of the largest families of catfishes in South America, but most of its representatives are confined to fresh water. The few species regularly occurring in brackish or freshened seawater belong to the genera *Brachyplatystoma*, *Hypophthalmus*, and *Pimelodus*. Juveniles and young adults of *Brachyplatystoma* occur in brackish water along the northeastern coast of South America at the time of fresh water flooding during the rainy season. Both are fished for, and marketed, locally. *Pimelodus blochii* (widely referred to as *Pimelodus clarias*) is often found in estuarine habitats. This moderately small catfish is extensively fished for, and marketed, in the lower reaches of rivers and river mouths throughout northern South America. Species of lookdown catfish (*Hypophthalmus* spp.), which had previously been placed in the family Hypophthalmidae are now considered to be pimelodid catfish (Lundberg et al. 1991, de Pinna 1998). Unlike most pimelodids (which are benthic feeders), the lookdown catfish generally swim in the water column and feed on plankton.

Similar families occurring in the area

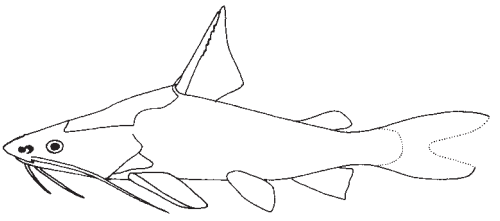
Note: Diagnoses only refer to species found in marine or estuarine environments.

Ariidae: anterior and posterior nostrils close together, posterior nostril partially covered along its anterior margin by a flap.

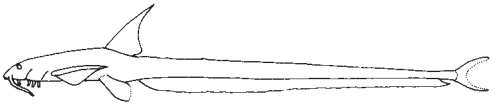
Aspredinidae: head and anterior body depressed, posterior part of body long and whip-like; eyes minute; gill opening reduced to tiny slits in front of pectoral fin; adipose fin absent.

Auchenipteridae (*Pseudauchenipterus nodosus* only): maxillary barbel not extending past pectoral-fin spine; lateral line prominent and wavy, forked on caudal peduncle; base of dorsal-fin spine swollen; head shield with honeycomb texture.

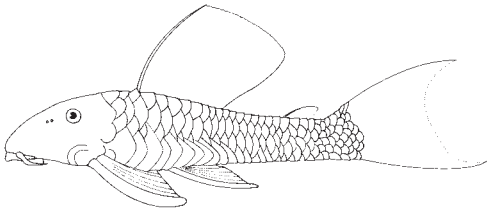
Loricariidae: body covered with hard bony plates; mouth inferior, surrounded by disc-shaped lips.



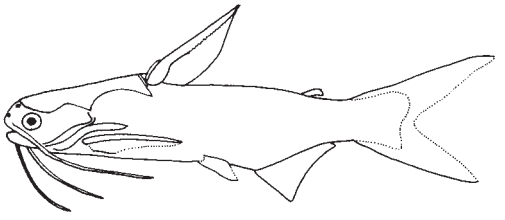
Ariidae



Aspredinidae



Loricariidae



Auchenipteridae

Key to the species of Pimelodidae occurring in the area

1a. Eye ventrolaterally placed; anal-fin base long, more than 1/3 standard length; adipose fin very small; dorsal fin not anterior of anal-fin origin, spine feeble and flexible . . . . . ***Hypophthalmus edentatus***

1b. Eye lateral or dorsolaterally placed; anal-fin base short, not longer than adipose-fin base; dorsal fin completely anterior to anal fin, spine stout . . . . . → ***2***

2a. No teeth on palate; eye large, its diameter contained about twice in snout length . . ***Pimelodus blochii***

2b. Large patches of teeth present on palate; eye small, its diameter contained about 5 times in snout length . . . . . → ***3***

3a. Upper jaw strongly protruding over lower jaw; upper half of body with indistinct round or ovoid spots (visible in preserved as well as in fresh specimens); adipose-fin base equal in length to anal-fin base; gill rakers on first arch 17 to 21. . . . . ***Brachyplatystoma filamentosum***

3b. Upper jaw only slightly protruding over lower jaw; upper half of body without markings; adipose-fin base distinctly longer than anal-fin base; gill rakers on first arch 25 to 31 . . . . . ***Brachyplatystoma vaillantii***

List of species occurring in the area

The symbol is given when species accounts are included.

- *Brachyplatystoma filamentosum* (Lichtenstein, 1819).
- *Brachyplatystoma vaillantii* (Valenciennes, 1840).
- *Hypophthalmus edentatus* (Spix and Agassiz, 1829).
- *Pimelodus blochii* Valenciennes, 1840.

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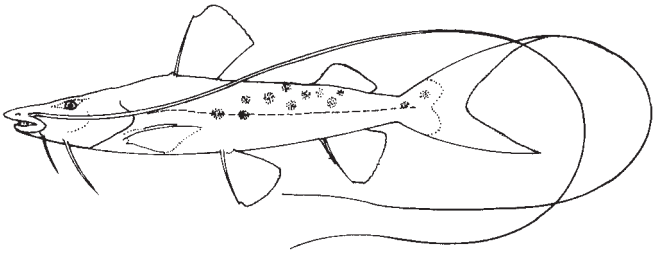
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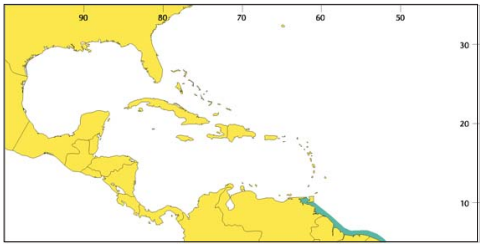
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Brachyplatystoma filamentosum (Lichtenstein, 1819) BPF

En - Kumakuma; **Fr** - Bagre laulao; **Sp** - Bagre laulau.

Maximum size to over 200 cm total length; commonly to 120 cm. Juveniles and sub-adults occur in river mouths and estuaries from the Gulf of Paria, Venezuela, to northern Brazil. Caught on hook-and-line and in gill nets. Highly prized and marketed fresh.

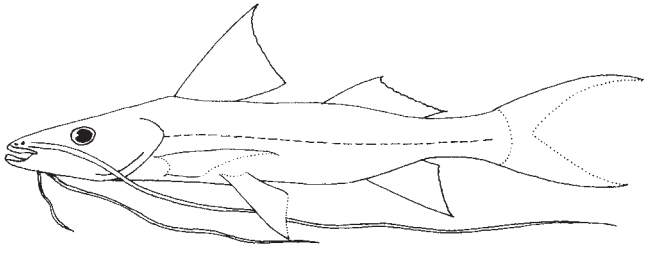


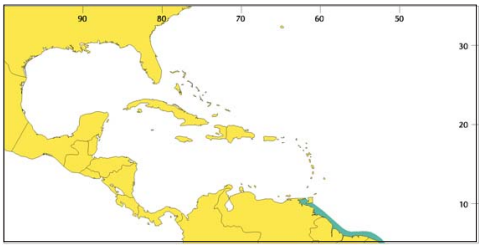


Brachyplatystoma vaillantii (Valenciennes, 1840) BPT

En - Laulao catfish (AFS: Piramutaba); **Fr** - Bagre vaillant; **Sp** - Valentón.

Maximum size to over 150 cm total length; commonly to 80 cm. Juveniles and sub-adults occur in river mouths and estuaries from the Gulf of Paria, Venezuela, to northern Brazil. Caught on hook-and-line and in gill nets. Highly prized and marketed fresh.

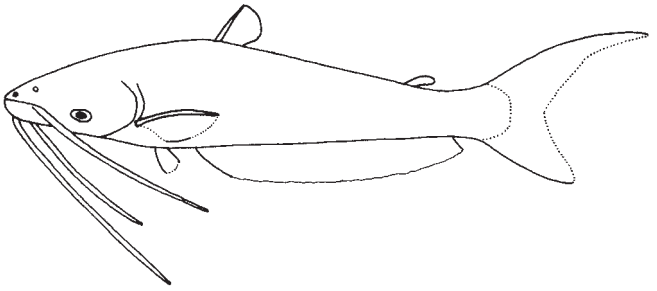


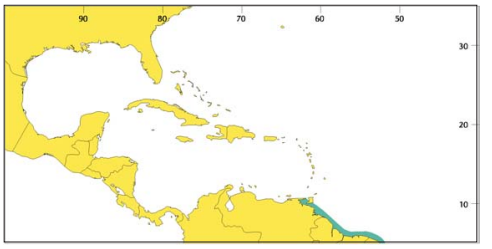


Hypophthalmus edentatus (Spix and Agassiz, 1829)

En - Highwaterman catfish; **Fr** - Bagre paysan; **Sp** - Bagre paisano.

Maximum size 57 cm total length; commonly to 45 cm. Occurs in estuaries and along the coast to a depth of 37 m, along the northern coast of South America from the Gulf of Paria, Venezuela, to northern Brazil. This species is caught by people fishing for predominantly marine species (mainly with traps). Because it appears in these catches only during the rainy season when the rivers are in flood, this species is locally known as “highwaterman”. It is marketed locally, both fresh and salted.

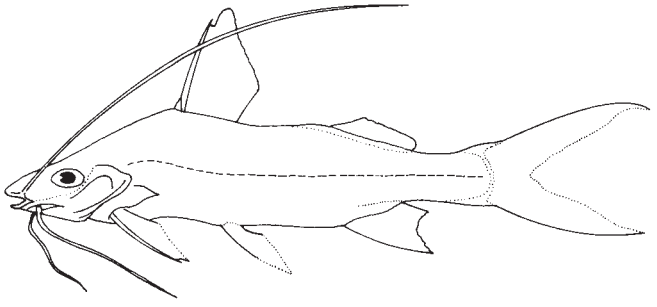


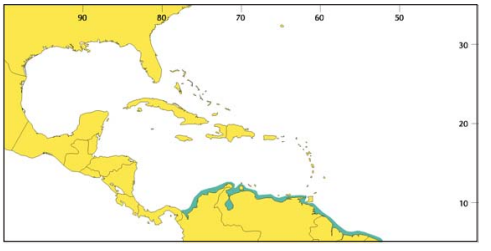


Pimelodus blochii Valenciennes, 1840

En - Bloch’s catfish; **Fr** - Bagre pimélode; **Sp** - Bagre cogotúo.

Maximum size 35 cm total length; commonly to 20 cm. Occurs in river mouths and occasionally in estuaries, from southern Panama to Brazil. Caught in gillnets and by hook-and-line.





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