

Three new species of *Microbrotula* (Teleostei: Ophidiiformes: Bythitidae) from the Indo-West Pacific

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Abstract

Three new species of the rare Indo-Pacific fish genus *Microbrotula* are described. *Microbrotula bentleyi* sp. n. is known in the western Indian Ocean from the Gulf of Aqaba, Red Sea, and South Africa. Two species occur off Queensland, Australia, *M. polyactis* sp. n. and *M. queenslandica* sp. n. The species of *Microbrotula* are distinguished mainly on the basis of counts of the axial skeleton, scale rows and pectoral-fin rays, but some morphometric characters are also diagnostic, such as orbit diameter, predorsal length and fleshy interorbital width. All species live in coral-reef or rubble areas to depths of about 50 m. New material of *M. randalli* Cohen and Wourms, 1976 was studied and *Microbrotula* is re-diagnosed.

Key words: Bythitidae, Bythitinae, *Microbrotula*, Indo-West Pacific

Introduction

Gosline (1953) established the genus *Microbrotula* for two species of livebearing brotulas from coral reef and rubble areas in Hawaii, with *M. rubra* the type species. The second species, *M. nigra*, was transferred to *Oligopus* Risso where it was a homonym and renamed *O. waikiki*, now *Grammonus waikiki* (Cohen, 1964; Nielsen and Cohen, 1999). Within their redefined subfamily Bythitinae, family Bythitidae, Cohen and Nielsen (1978) suggested *Microbrotula* might be a shallow-water derivative of the bathyal genus *Cataetyx*. Machida (2000) considered his new genus *Acarobythites* close to *Microbrotula* which it resembles in many characters, but differs from it in its lack of scales, 11–12 caudal-fin rays, morphology of the anteriormost neural spines, vomerine teeth arranged in a single row, indistinct lateral line and short pectoral and pelvic fins.

Cohen and Wourms (1976) described *Microbrotula randalli* from five specimens taken on reefs at Efate Island, Vanuatu, and American Samoa. Additional material I have