



***Pristolepis rubripinnis*, a new species of fish from southern India (Teleostei: Percomorpha: Pristolepididae)**

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Abstract

Pristolepis rubripinnis, new species, from the Pamba and Chalakudy rivers in Kerala, India, is distinguished from all other species of the genus by its colour pattern, which includes orange-red soft dorsal, soft anal and caudal fins, and a yellow to orange pelvic fin. It differs further from its southern Indian congener *P. marginata* in having 4 or 5 scales above the lateral line (vs. 3) and 10 scales below it (vs. 9)

Key words: Taxonomy; freshwater fish; Western Ghats and Sri Lanka Biodiversity Hotspot

Introduction

The genus *Pristolepis* comprises moderate-sized (15–20 cm) percomorph fishes with an interesting disjunct distribution, restricted to freshwater streams in southern India and most of Indochina and the Sunda Islands (see e.g. Berra 2001). The monogeneric Pristolepididae form a monophyletic group with the percomorph taxa Nandidae, Badidae, Anabantidae, Helostomatidae, Osphronemidae and Channidae, characterized uniquely among percomorphs by the possession of teeth on the parasphenoid (Britz 1995, 2003; Wiley & Johnson 2010). In *Pristolepis*, the well developed parasphenoid toothpatch is opposed by a greatly enlarged and toothed basibranchial toothplate together forming an effective crushing apparatus in the pharynx in addition to the pharyngeal jaws (Liem & Greenwood 1981).

Of the seven nominal species only three are currently recognized, *P. marginata*, *P. fasciata*, and *P. grootii*. Quite some confusion surrounds the two nominal species described from southern India, *Pristolepis marginata* Jerdon, 1849 and *P. malabarica* (Günther, 1864). Soon after Günther's description in 1864, Jerdon (1865) considered the two species to be conspecific, whereas Day (1865b, 1875–1878, 1889) treated both as valid species. Day's (1865b, 1875–1878, 1889) view was followed by Jayaram (1981). Hora & Law (1941: 239) also listed two *Pristolepis* species for southern India, and identified them as *P. fasciata* and *P. malabarica*. Talwar & Jhingran (1991) recognized only *P. marginata* for southern India and treated Günther's *P. malabarica* as a junior synonym, which was adopted by Jayaram (1999, 2010). Most recent checklists also mention *P. marginata* as the only species of this genus in southern India (e.g. Gopi 2006, Rema Devi *et al.* 2007).

While collecting fishes in the Pamba river near Edathua, Kerala, we sampled several specimens of *Pristolepis* that differed greatly in colour pattern from the commonly encountered *Pristolepis marginata*. This prompted a re-examination of the types of the southern Indian species of *Pristolepis*, which showed that the Pamba specimens belong to a species new to science; this is herein described.