II. SYSTEMATIC POSITION
POSITION OF AMBASSIS COMMERSONI
Plate-1  Ambassis commersoni (Cuvier)
Ambassis commersoni, Cuvier is a bony fish belonging to class Teleostomi, order - Perciformes, sub order - Percoidei and Family Ambassidae.

The family Ambassidae is well represented in the coastal waters and estuaries of tropical and sub-tropical areas of Red Sea, East Coast of Africa through the seas of India, Malay Archipelago to North Australia and even beyond as reported by Day (1889).

Family Ambassidae

Small perch like fishes with compressed body, more or less dimorphous with easily shed cycloid scales moderate or small size frequently deciduous. Oblique mouth with fine villiform teeth on jaws, vomer and palate, sometimes on the tongue, canines rarely present. A forwardly directed recumbent spine in front of the base of dorsal fin. Scaly sheath at the base of dorsal and anal. Operculum with single poorly developed spine. A characteristic feature of the family is the double edge of the preoperculum, so that this bone may be said to have an edge and ridge, the lower edge is nearly always dentate. The hind limb edge is entire in several specimens. Dorsal fin of two continuous parts separated by a notch between the last and penultimate spines. The first dorsal fin with 7 spines and a procumbent spine.
and the second dorsal fin with one spine and 9 to 17 soft rays. Anal fin with 3 spines and 9 to 16 soft rays. Pelvic fin with one strong spine and 5 soft rays with an auxiliary scale. Caudal fin forked, lateral line complete, simply interrupted or very distinctly broken.

Fishes of small size (generally under 10 cm.) in the Indo West Pacific Region, enter estuaries and penetrate to freshwater. Usually brilliant or silvery white in colour.

Key to Genus: Ambassis

1. Scales large, 25 to 30 in the longitudinal series; 1 or 2 transverse rows of scales on cheek.
2. Scales relatively small, 40 or more in longitudinal series; 4 or more transverse rows of scales on cheek.

Ambassis, Cuvier 1828

= Chanda Hamilton (ne Buchanan), 1822, fishes Ganges - 370
= Priopin (Kuhl and Van Hasselt) Valenciennes, Cuvier and Valenciennes, 1830, 6: 503, type species, Priopis argyrozoa (k f v.II) Valenciennes, 1836 by monotype.
Ambassis apogonoides Bleeker, 1851, by original designation.

= Pseudambassis Bleeker, 1876, Systema percarum revisum, Archs. neerl. Sci. nat. 11(2); 292, type species Pseudambassis lala Bleeker = Chanda lala Hamilton (ne Buchanan), 1822, by original designation.

Distinguishing characters of the Genus - Ambassis

Branchiostegals six: pseudobranchi well developed. Body compressed, more or less diaphanous. Lower limb of preopercle with a double serrated edge. Opercle without prominent spine. Villiform teeth on jaws, vomer and palate sometimes on the tongue, canines rarely present. Two dorsal fins, the first with seven spines, the anal with three, a forwardly directed recumbent spine in front of the base of the dorsal fin. Scales cycloid, of moderate or small size, frequently deciduous. Lateral line complete, interrupted, incomplete or absent. Although this genus consists of little bony fishes, which rarely exceed six inches in length, are generally far less. Buchanan (1822) while observing genus 'chanda', which is mostly composed of species of Ambassis, reported that they are very small and of little value, although in many places abundant and used in considerable quantities. Gill rakers well developed 13 or more on lower arm of first arch. Some difficulty exists in ascertaining the species of this genus for the following reasons. The relative
length of the second or third spine to that of the body differs in accordance with the size of the specimen, and local variations.

Key to Species :-

1. (a) Supraorbital ridge dentate at least posteriorly; interoperculum entire; preorbital dentate on both edge and ridge.
(b) Supraorbital ridge smooth, but usually with a single backwardly directed spine posteriorly (rarely two or absent).

2. (a) Posterior edge (i.e vertical limb or preoperculum denticulate) with 6 to 13 small serrae.
   A. dussumieri.
(b) Posterior edge of preoperculum entire (i.e smooth).
   A. gymnocephalus.

3. (a) Interoperculum smooth.
        4
(b) Interoperculum denticulate, posteriorly.
        6

4. (a) One transverse row of scales on cheek; lateral line continuous or little interrupted.
   A. commersoni
(b) Two transverse rows of scales on cheek.
        5
5. (a) Third dorsal spine slightly longer than second dorsal spine; predorsal scales 13 to 16.
   A. miops

(b) Third dorsal spine distinctly shorter than second dorsal spine; predorsal scales 17 to 22.
   A. macracanthus

6. (a) Posterior margin of preoperculum denticulate.
   A. dayis

(b) Posterior margin of preoperculum entire.
   ......... 7

7. (a) Predorsal scales 8 or 9.
   A. kopsii

(b) Predorsal scales 11 to 16.
   ......... 8

8. (a) Gill-rakers 18 to 22 on lower arm of first arch; lateral line continuous throughout its length.
   A. nalua

(b) Gill-rakers 24 to 27 on lower arm of first arch; lateral line well interrupted in middle portion.
   A. interruptus

From Indo-Pacific region only two species are known first is A. commersoni and second is A. bleekeri until 1984 as A. gymnocephalus. The two can be distinguished by the following characters.
Difference between *A. commersoni* and *A. gymnocephalus*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Commersoni</th>
<th>A. Gymnocephalus</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lateral line continuous</td>
<td>Lateral line interrupted</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. 3 scales below lateral line</td>
<td>2 scales below lateral line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Head as high as long</td>
<td>Head more longer than high (height)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interopercular region smooth or with a single or two dentation.</td>
<td>Interopercular region without dentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Height 1/3 - 1/3.5 of total length.</td>
<td>Height 1/3.75 to 1/4 of total length.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Second dorsal spine bigger than or equal to length of head.</td>
<td>Second dorsal spine smaller than the length of the head.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Upper jaw ends below the frontal half of the eye.</td>
<td>Upper jaw ends at the frontal half of the eye.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Synopsis of species:**

1. **Ambassis nama** :- D. 7/18-17, A. 14-17
   - Blunt serrations along horizontal limb of preopercle and on preorbital. Large curved canines in lower jaw. Yellowish olive with a dark shoulder mark. Fresh waters of India, Assam and Burma.

2. **Ambassis ranga** :- D. 7/18-16, A. 14-10
   - L. r. 60-70. Vertical limb of preopercle serrated or entire. Both edges of its lower limb or preorbital serrated. Golden with vertical bands and black margins to the fins in the young. Fresh water of India and Burma.
(3) Ambassis baculis: - D. 7  - - - - - - - A.  - - - - L. r. 80
                          15     15
Double lower edge of the preopercle serrated. Also the
preorbital and upper edge of the orbit. No canines.
Yellowish-olive with a golden occipital spot. Fresh
waters of Bengal to the Punjab and Orissa.

(4) Ambassis thomassi: - D. 7  - - - - - - - A. - - - - L.1.
                          11-12  9-10
35-41. Vertical limb and double lower edge of preopercle
and posterior half of interopercle serrated. Preorbital
also serrated. Silvery spotted. Malabar Coast in fresh
water.

(5) Ambassis commersoni: - D. 7  - - - - - - - A. - - - - L.1.
                          10-11  9-10
30-33. Double lower edge of preopercle serrated.
Interopercle entire; preorbital also serrated. Silvery,
seas of India.

(6) Ambassis nulua: - D. 7/  - - - - - - - A. - - - - L.1.
                          10-11  9-10
26-27. Double lower edge of preopercle and posterior
half of interopercle serrated; preorbital also serrated.
Silvery. Fresh waters of India near the coast.

(7) Ambassis interrupta: - D. 7/  - - - - - - - A. - - - - L.1.
                          10-11  9-10
28. Double lower edge of preopercle serrated; interopercle
with a few denticulations at its angle; preorbital


Snout pointed. Vertical limb of preopercle minutely serrated; its double lower border more coarsely so, also the posterior half of the interopercle and the preorbital. Malabar.

It appears (therefore) that there are two species in the Indo-Pacific region.
- the first with a continuous lateral line.
  Ambassis commersoni Cuvier, 1828
  = Ambassis ambassis (Lacepide, 1801) Fowler 1905, 1925, 1928.
  = Ambassis saffra (Forskal, 1775) Fowler 1927, Fowler and Bean, 1930.
- the second with a interrupted lateral line.
  Ambassis gymnocephalus (not Lacepide, 1801) Bleeker, 1874.
  = Ambassis dussumieri Cuvier, 1928.
Fig. 1a  Body outline of *A. commersoni*. 
Common Name :-

English - Commerson's glassy perchlet.
Tamil - Selanthaan
Marathi - Kachki
Konkani - Burryate

Characters :- (Fig. 1 & Plate 1)

B. vi,  D 7/6  -----  P 13,  V. 1/5,  A. 0  -----  11
C 15, 1, 30.30, L. tr. 4/9 Vert. 9/15  1

Length of head about 1/4 of caudal 2/9 height of body 3 - 9
to 3/7 of the total length.

Eye :- diameter 1/3 to 2/7 of length of head, 1/2 a diameter
from end of snout and also apart.

Dorsal and anal: Profiles about equally convex. Lower jaw
the longer, its cleft very oblique, so that when closed it
forms a portion of the anterior profile. The maxilla reaches
to below the first third of the orbit. Preorbital rather
strongly serrated, the serratures being directed downwards
and slightly backwards. Vertical limb of preopercle entire,
its inferior having double edge serrated, two serrated, two
or coarser teeth being at the angle; lower margin of
interopercle entire. Two or three small and blunt
denticulations at the posterior superior angle of the orbit
and a line between it and the posterior superior angle of
the opercle.
Teeth: Villiform in the jaws, in a single shaped row in the vomer and also present in the palatines.

Tongue: Tongue usually with a narrow band along its centre.

Fins: Dorsal spines strong, transversely lineated, a serrated appearance to the second which is the longest, and equal to the length of the head behind the front margin of the orbit or even slightly longer. The ventral does not extend to the anal. Dorsal fin with 7 spines followed by deep notch, the second part of fin with one spine and 9 to 11 soft rays.

Anal fin: Anal fin with 3 spines and 9 to 10 soft rays. Anal spine the strongest and nearly as long as the third which almost equals the third of the dorsal.

Caudal fin: Caudal fin deeply forked, upper lobe usually longer.

Lateral line: Lateral line continuous or little interrupted.

Gill-rakers: Gill rakers 20 - 22 on lower arm of first branchial arch, well developed.

Scales: Scales relatively small cycloid 40 or more lines in the longitudinal series. 4 or more transverse rows of scales on cheek.
Colour:-- Body silvery with purplish reflections and bright silvery lateral band line from eye to caudal fin. Interspinous membrane between the second and third dorsal spine dark.

Geographical distribution:--

This common species extends from the Red Sea through India to North Australia. It ascends rivers and estuaries. Attaining six inches in length. Hamilton (1822) found a fish in the River Ganges. It is also found in Goa, Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay along the South Eastern Coast in particular and other parts of the coastal belt of India and Java seas.

Uses:-- The poorer classes eat them, other classes eat them only in rainy season when other fishes are not caught. Even though it is caught throughout the year, the main fishery season is from June to September. They are extensively consumed by the larger fishes, forming much of their sustenance during the dry months of years. As a food they have little value. Defect is their small size and small bones.

It is mainly and easily sun dried without salt and marketed. It is dried and used as manure also.
### Synonym

**Ambassis commersoni**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Perea Safgha</td>
<td>B1 Schn P 86</td>
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<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>Prio Pis (kuhl &amp; Van Hasselt)</td>
<td>Cuveirs valenciennes VI, 503, Haplotype Priopis argyrozone Kuhl &amp; Van Hasselt. (David &amp; Jordon P.P.174)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Hamiltonia swainzon</td>
<td>David &amp; Jordon page 200</td>
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<td>1853</td>
<td>Bagada bleeker</td>
<td>David &amp; Jordon Page 253 &amp; 275</td>
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<td>1859</td>
<td>Ambassis commersoni</td>
<td>Gunther catali Page 223</td>
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<td>1874</td>
<td>Parambassis bleeker</td>
<td>David and Jordon Page 374</td>
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<td>11</td>
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