

CHAPTER III

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT PREFERENCES

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Distribution and Habitat Preferences

The freshwater spiny eels have been reported from a variety of freshwater as well as brackishwater bodies of tropical Asia and Africa (Traverse, 1984a), but *Mastacembelus pancalus* is restricted only to Asia. The restriction of this fish to Asian region could be related with the suitable environmental conditions available for this fish in the region. It is known to occur in rivers, lakes, ponds, estuaries, streams and ditches.

The striped spiny eel, *Mastacembelus pancalus* is burrowing in habits and make a unique burrow into the bottom. The fish spends most of its life time on the bottom of the water bodies and develop a unique niche in the sediments of water bodies. It often takes shelter under the submerged objects in the fast flowing waters. This mastacembelid can live

in oxygen deficient water and wet soil for a long period of time. It is considered to be an air breathing fish (Srivastava, 1968).

The striped spiny eel, *Mastacembelus pancalus* has been reported from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Malaysia, Thailand and continental island of Indonesia. The fish known to occur in various states of Indian region are Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Punjab, Hariyana, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu except Coromandel Coast south of the Kistna river. A survey of northern India and central India was made to find out species composition and distribution of the fish and was found to landed at various places like Allahabad, Varanasi, Mirzapur, Sant Ravidas Nagar-Bhadohi, Kanpur, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Muzaffar Nagar, Mathura, Lucknow and Bereilly districts in Uttar Pradesh; Dehradocn, Hardwar, Almorah and Tehri Garhwal districts in Uttaranchal state; Patra, Gaya, Jehnabad, Madhubani, Muzuffarpur and Saharsha districts in Bihar state; Hoogly, Midnapur, Burdwan, Malda, Bakura, New Jalpaiguri and Kolkata in West Bengal and in Delhi.

Fishery information

The striped spiny eel, *Mastacembelus pancalus* is considered to be the most beautiful species among the freshwater spiny eels. The fish attains a maximum length of 18 cm in peninsular India, while it grows up to 9-10 cm in West Bengal. However, a maximum length of 16 cm was

recorded in the present study. The smaller size of this fish has often been placed into aquaria and kept by hobbyists, while the large size fish is used as a table fish, and fetches a good price in the market. The demand of the fish remains always high as compared to its supply. The fish is generally popular for those people who want fish without bones.