

Monopterus rongsaw, a new species of hypogean swamp eel from the Khasi Hills in Northeast India (Teleostei: Synbranchiformes: Synbranchidae)

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A new species of hypogean swamp eel, *Monopterus rongsaw*, is described from the Khasi Hills in Meghalaya, India. It was discovered while digging rock-strewn and moist soil close to a small stream during attempts to find caecilians. The new species differs from other synbranchids by the combination of absence of skin pigmentation, the eyes being tiny and covered by skin, and a count of 92 precaudal and 69 caudal vertebrae.

Introduction

Swamp eels of the family Synbranchidae are unique among bony fishes in lacking pectoral, pelvic, dorsal, anal, and usually also caudal fins (Rosen & Greenwood, 1976). Although phylogenetically members of the Percomorpha, superficially they look much more like true eels with which they are frequently confused. Synbranchids live in freshwaters on all continents except Antarctica (Rosen & Greenwood, 1976) with some species entering brackish water (Talwar & Jhingran, 1992) and even coastal marine areas (Tyler & Feller, 1996). Several species are adapted to life in semiterrestrial habitats, with their highly vascularised secondary air-breathing organs and changes to their vasculatory systems (Hyrtl, 1858; Das, 1946; Liem, 1961; Samuel, 1963; Rosen & Greenwood, 1976) enabling them to obtain oxygen from the air. Other species have so far been col-

lected exclusively from caves (Hubbs 1938) and natural (Mees 1962) or man-made wells (Eapen, 1963; Bailey & Gans, 1998; Gopi 2002) or from soil (Britz et al., 2016). These hypogean synbranchids all share a substantial reduction or complete lack of skin pigmentation and highly reduced eyes that are not visible externally. Hypogean species of swamp eels are found in Central America (Hubbs, 1938), West and western Central Africa (Pellegrin, 1922; Britz et al., 2016), and the Indian subcontinent [southern India: Eapen (1963), Bailey & Gans (1998), Gopi (2002), and Sri Lanka: Bailey & Gans (1998)]. Three species of pigmentless, attenuate synbranchids without externally visible eyes are known from the south of India, where they have thus far been recorded only from laterite areas in the state of Kerala and encountered almost exclusively in deep, man-made wells (Eapen, 1963; Bailey & Gans, 1998; Gopi, 2002).

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