

Ophichthys terricolus, a new species of hypogean swamp eel from Cachar, Assam (Teleostei: Synbranchiformes: Synbranchidae)

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A new species of swamp eel, *Ophichthys terricolus*, is described from Assam, India. The new species closely resembles the common *Ophichthys cuchia* but differs from this species by having fewer abdominal vertebrae (79–80 vs. 95–100), a longer preanal and shorter postanal region, and a wider and higher posterior part of the body.

Introduction

Swamp eels of the family Synbranchidae are a small group of eel-like percomorphs with currently at least 24 valid species, distributed in South and Central America, West Africa, large parts of Asia, as well as Australia (Rosen & Greenwood, 1976; Bailey & Gans, 1998; Gopi, 2002; Favorito et al., 2005; Kottelat, 2013; Britz et al., 2011, 2016, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2021, 2022). Swamp eels are peculiar among teleosts because they lack pectoral, pelvic, dorsal, anal, and usually also caudal fins (Rosen & Greenwood, 1976). Synbranchids also have highly vascularised accessory air-breathing organs in combination with strikingly modified vascular systems to exploit atmospheric oxygen (Hyrtl, 1858; Liem, 1961; Samuel, 1963; Rosen & Greenwood, 1976).

To date, 11 species of synbranchids have been recorded from India, of which six are restricted to the Western Ghats area of southern India, four occur only in the north of the country (Britz et al., 2018, 2020b), and one, the brackish water *Ophisternon bengalense*, along coastal areas of India. Among these, the northern Indian species *Ophichthys cuchia* has a wide distribution ranging from Pakistan, through northern India, the North Eastern Region (NER) of India, Nepal, and Bangladesh to Myanmar (Rosen & Greenwood, 1976; Menon, 1999). This species has recently established non-native reproducing populations in the USA (Jordan et al., 2020; Best et al., 2022). Ichthyologists traditionally search for fishes using nets, and not through soil-digging surveys, but in the recent past, burrowing, semi-terrestrial synbranchid eels have been found by herpeto-

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