Notes on the Snake Eel *Neenchelys butendijki* (Ophichthidae: Myrophinae), a New Record for Malaysia
(Mengenai Belut Ular *Neenchelys butendijki* (Ophichthidae: Myrophinae), Satu Rekod Baru untuk Malaysia)

Hsuân-Chîng Ho, Hong-Wooi Teoh & Ying-Chîng Chông*

**ABSTRACT**

*Neenchelys butendijki* Weber and de Beaufort, 1916 from Malaysia is reported for the first time. Five specimens collected from Matang, Peninsular Malaysia, represent the third record in the Indo-western Pacific region. A detailed description is provided to document the species into the fish fauna of Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Anguilliformes; fish; *Neenchelys*; new record; taxonomy

**INTRODUCTION**

The snake eel genus *Neenchelys* is a small group of elongated fishes comprising at least 8 species (Ho, pers. data) which can be found in the West-Indo Pacific Ocean. Among them, *Neenchelys butendijki* Weber and de Beaufort, 1916 is one of the most poorly known species. The species was described from Bay of Jakarta, Indonesia and subsequently recorded from India by Mohamed (1958) and from Red Sea by Manilo and Bogorodsky (2003). Nelson (1966) studied the osteology and suggested species of *Neenchelys* to be placed under subfamily Echelinae (=Myrophinae) of Ophichthidae. Although Mohamed (1958) provided additional information for the species and suggested *N. butendijki* to be common in India, no further taxonomic information was provided for more than five decades. While investigating the fish fauna in the Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve (MMFR), five specimens were collected from a mudflat off the Selinsing River, Straits of Malacca, northwestern Peninsular Malaysia (Figure 1). These specimens represent the first record from Malaysia and a detailed description is provided to document this species into the fish fauna of Malaysia.

**METHODS AND MATERIALS**

The fishes were collected by a small otter trawl over the mudflats in Selinsing Bay and vicinities. Total length (TL) was used as fish size measurement. The terminology and methods for taking morphometric measurements (15 measurements) and meristic counts (12) followed that of Böhlke (1989). The specimens used in this study were deposited at National Museum of Marine Biology & Aquarium, Taiwan (NMMB-P).

**RESULTS**

*Neenchelys butendijki* Weber and de Beaufort, 1916: 268, Figures 116-117 (Type locality: Bay of Jakarta, Java; Moluccas).

Material examined. All material were collected from Matang, Malaysia. NMMB-P 13649 (238 mm TL), off shore, 4°49’30.42”N, 100°29’11.76”E, small otter trawl, 6 Oct. 2009. NMMB-P 13650 (198 mm TL), mudflat, 4°51’1.26”N, 100°31’10.8”E, small otter trawl, 3 m, 1 Dec. 2009. NMMB-P 13651 (211 mm TL), offshore, 449’54.18”N, 100°31’10.8”E, small otter trawl, 3.3 m, 16 Jan. 2010. NMMB-P 13652 (225 mm TL), mudflat, 4°50’53.64”N, 100°30’49.32”E, small otter trawl, 1.9 m, 16 Jan. 2010. NMMB-P 13653 (192 mm TL), mudflat, 4°50’48.48”N, 100°31’31.74”E, 2.1 m, small otter trawl, 3 Aug. 2010.

Diagnosis. A species of *Neenchelys* with strongly pointed snout; a well-developed pectoral fin, 4.0-4.8 in HL; origin of dorsal fin relatively forward, at first fifth of trunk; a relatively large gill opening, its height 6.8-8.5 in HL; 18-20 predorsal, 49-51 preanal and 137-140 total vertebrae; 13-14 prepectoral, 20-22 pre-dorsal and 51-54 predorsal lateral-line pores.