

A NOTABLE ICHTHYOLOGICAL FIND IN  
THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

by

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*Abstract*—A notable ichthyological find has been made in the Kruger National Park with the recording, during April 1970, of a specimen of the marine fish, *Acanthopagrus berda* (Forsk.) near the confluence of the Crocodile and Komati Rivers. This is the first record of the River or Mud Bream within the fresh water river system of the Transvaal and also the furthest point inland that this fish has been collected.

On 3 April 1970, one of the rangers of the Kruger National Park, P. van der Hyde, was angling for tigerfish in the Komati River, immediately east of its confluence with the Crocodile River in the southeastern corner of the park. He was using small live *Tilapia* as bait and had by mid-afternoon bagged several small to medium-sized tigerfish. After 2 pm there was a lull in activity, but ranger Van der Hyde noted that on reeling his bait in slowly it attracted the attention of a fish which struck the bait in a manner completely different from that of tigerfish. The bait was attacked in a series of short bursts and worried in a jerking fashion. On striking he managed to hook one of these predating fishes and on reeling in noticed that it had the body of a bream and was silvery in colour. Unfortunately, just before landing the fish it dislodged the hook and broke away.

Using a smaller hook he soon received another bite and this time the fish was landed.

On closer inspection the fish, which was 21 cm long, did have the general appearance of a bream, but with a bright silvery colour and a dark opercular spot on the upper portion of the gill-cover. It also differed from the endemic *Tilapia* spp in having dark stripes between the dorsal, caudal and anal fin rays and six sharp conical teeth in the front of both the upper and lower jaws (*Vide* Figure).

Ranger Van der Hyde carefully preserved the specimen with formalin and brought it to the research centre at Skukuza where it was identified as a marine fish i.e. the River or Mud Bream *Acanthopagrus berda* (Forsk.). This is an abundant and widespread species in tropical Indo-Pacific

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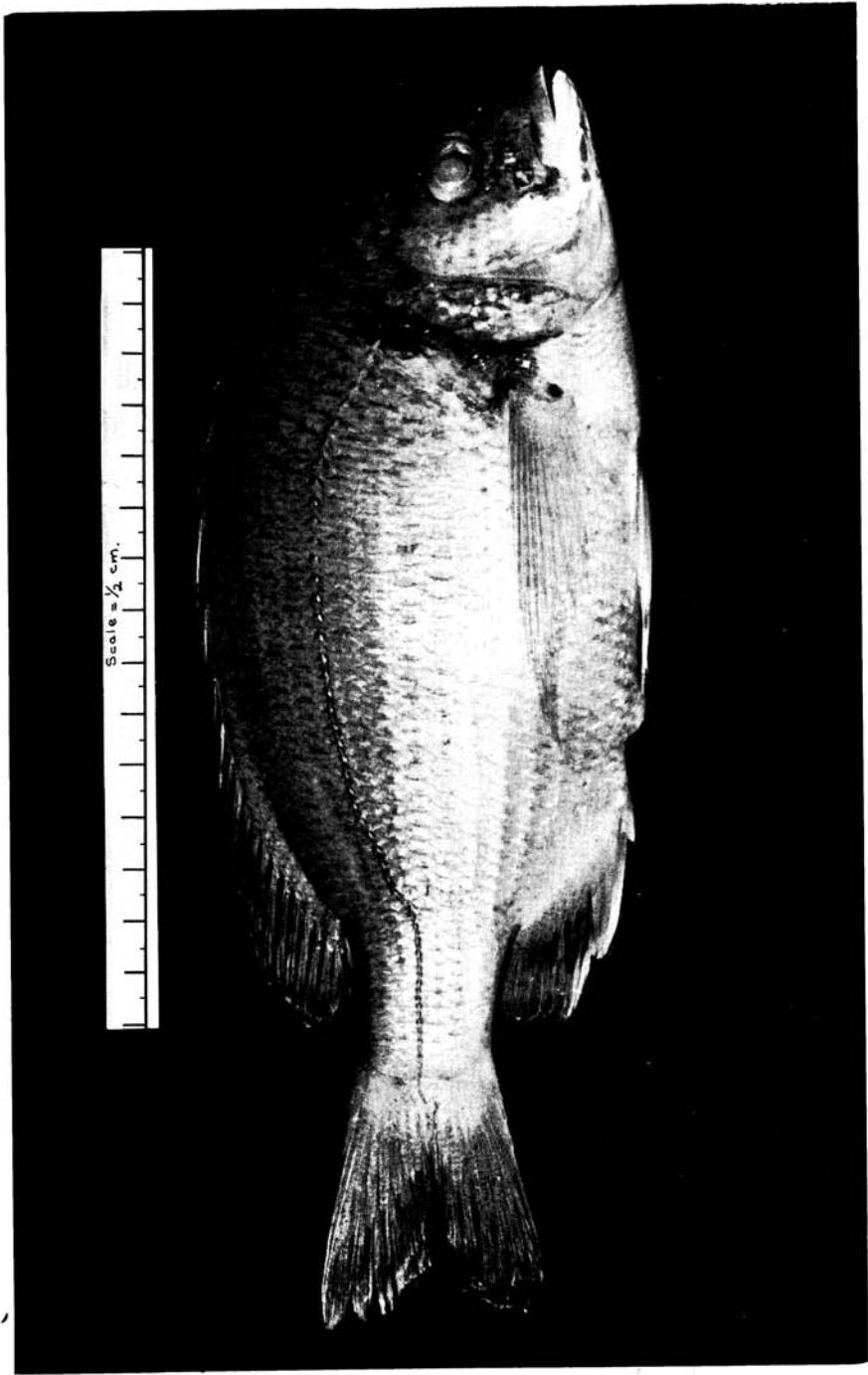


Figure. Specimen of *Acanthopagrus berda* (Forsk.) caught at the Komati-Crocodile River confluence.

waters. It is plentiful along the Mocambique coast, particularly in estuaries, and is also a well-known angling fish in Natal and Pondoland waters. Although it is commonly found in estuaries and tidal river mouths it has not as yet been recorded from inland waters, and no records of its having been taken from fresh water sources could be traced.

Gaigher (1969) took some specimens in the San Martinho estuary in Mocambique as well as in the lower reaches of the Incomati River near Manica. The water in the Incomati at this point, which is about 48 km from the river mouth at Vila Luiza, is somewhat brackish and possibly influenced to some extent by the tidal flow. The Komati-Crocodile confluence is at least 240 km from the Incomati River mouth and the recording of obviously healthy specimens of *A. berda* at this point is remarkable and ample proof that it is another marine species which can adapt itself perfectly to a freshwater environment.

There are, of course, other marine species which have been recorded in the freshwater system of the Kruger National Park such as the gobies *Glossogobius giuris* (Hamilton—Buchanan) and *Platygobius aeneofuscus* (Peters) and the Zambezi shark *Carcharinus leucas* (Muller and Henle) (Pienaar, 1968).

In addition, tarpon *Megalops cyprinoides* (Broussonet) have been taken in the Lundi River at Selawandoma Falls in Rhodesia (Jubb, 1967) and at Jozini and Gepkan Pan along the Pongolo River (Pott, 1969); Saw-fishes *Pristis microdon* Latham from the Save River in Mocambique and Rhodesia and the Pipefish *Belonichthys fluviatilis* (Peters) from the Usutu River in Natal (Pott, 1969).

The Komati record of *A. berda* adds another species to this list and brings the total number of fish species which have been collected in the waters of the Kruger National Park to 47 (Pienaar, 1968).

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