A FIRST SIGHTING REPORT OF SIX FISHES FROM THE MAHATMA GANDHI MARINE NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH ANDAMAN, INDIA

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Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park (MGMNP), Wandoor, located between 11°22'06"–11°36'34"N & 92°30'00"–92°40'33"E, covering a total area of 281.5km² in the Bay of Bengal, is the first marine national park of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. It is located to the south-west of the main South Andaman Island, and is approximately 30km from Port Blair. Besides a vast stretch of enchanting marine waters, magnificent coral reefs and their associated fauna, sandy beaches and mangrove swamps, the park includes a labyrinth of 15 bushy vegetated islands, namely, Alexandra, Red Skin, Grub, Chester, Snob, Belle, Tarmugli, Boat, Malay, Pluto, Hobday, Rifleman, Jolly Buoy, Twins and part of Rutland islands. Under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, the park was declared as the Wandoor Marine National Park by the Andaman & Nicobar Administration on 24 May 1983. It was renamed MGMNP on 2 October 1994 vide notification No. 192/99/f.No. CWLW/WL/61 dated 18 October 1999 for the protection of the natural resources of these islands. As a part of tourism development, two islands in the park, viz., Jolly Buoy and Red Skin are open for tourists to visit in the favorable season.

The present status of the ichthyofauna of Andaman & Nicobar Islands are known by the recent work of Rao (2009). He has published a checklist of fishes with 1369 species under 586 genera belonging to 175 families. Based on the field survey and available literature, Roy et al. (2009) added 11 more species to the list of ichthyofauna of these islands. Ramakrishna et al. (2010) reported 83 new records of fishes with an updated checklist containing 1463 species from these islands. Rephrase: Eight islands namely Alexandra, Red Skin, Grub, Chester, Tarmugli, Hobday, Jolly Buoy and Twins were selected out of 15 islands in the national park for ichthyofaunal studies. By using underwater photography around the selected islands inside MGMNP, the authors encountered six new records of fishes from the Andaman Islands.

Materials and Methods: The underwater surveys have been carried out by using self containing underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA), around eight
islands inside the MGMNP from April 2011 to December 2012 to study the ichthyofauna of MGMNP at a maximum depth of 25m. Underwater photographs were taken by the Sony cyber shot (DSC-T900) camera with housing facility. The fishes that were recorded as first reports were identified with the standard systematic taxonomic keys (Weber & de Beaufort 1929; de Beufort 1940; Talwar & Kacker 1984; Smith & Heemstra 1986; Rao 2003; Allen et al. 2010).

**Results:**
Order: Perciformes  
Family: Apogonidae

1. **Cheilodipterus isostigmus** (Schultz, 1940) (Image 1A)  
   Common name: Toothy Cardinalfish  
   Material observed: Hobday Island (11°32.337’N & 92°36.194’E); depth 5–12 m, 03.vii.2012.  
   Diagnostic features: Attains 10cm. Body narrow and elongate, snout slightly pointed, canine teeth at front of lower jaw; colour whitish with five dark longitudinal stripes narrower than inter-space, base of caudal fin yellow with black spot which is slightly above the line of mid lateral stripe.

   Habitat & Ecology: Observed in sandy lagoons

2. **Cheilodipterus intermedius** Gon, 1993 (Image 1B)  
   Common name: Intermediate Cardinalfish  
   Material observed: Hobday Island (11°32.337’N & 92°36.194’E); depth 5–10 m, 03.vii.2012.  
   Diagnostic features: Attains 10–12 cm. Body narrow and elongate, snout slightly pointed; colour whitish-grey with eight broad dark brown to black stripes; tail base white with no hint of bar; upper and lower margins of caudal fin dusky.

   Habitat & Ecology: Observed in rocky and coral reef caves, usually in solitary form or in pairs. Feed on zooplankton and benthic invertebrates (Randall 1990).

   Distribution: Western Pacific, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam.

   Remarks: *Cheilodipterus intermedius* is a new record from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The similar
species *Cheilodipterus macrodon* has whitish tail base with dark to dusky bar and large pointed teeth.

3. **Ostorhinchus nigrofasciatus** Lachner, 1953 (Image 1C)
   
   **Common name:** Blackstripe cardinalfish
   
   **Material observed:** Tarmugli Island (11°37.386’N & 92°33.364’E); depth 10–15 m, 11.xii.2012.
   
   **Diagnostic features:** Small fishes approximately 6–7 cm. Mouth oblique; head rather short; trunk rounded; anterior preopercular margin smooth, posterior serrated. Body with five broad dark brown to black stripes, mid-lateral stripe does not extend onto tail; caudal fin forked.
   
   **Habitat & Ecology:** Observed in coral rubble and sandy bottom, usually in solitary form.
   
   **Distribution:** Japan, Indonesia, Philippines and Papua New Guinea.
   
   **Remarks:** Blue lines on head and blue caudal margin with yellow pectoral fin base are the remarkable features of Richmond’s Wrasse.

   **Family:** Labridae

   6. **Halichoeres cosmetus** Randall & Smith, 1982 (Image 1F)
   
   **Common name:** Cosmetic Wrasse
   
   **Material observed:** Alexandra Island (11°35.004’N & 92°34.923’E); depth 5–10 m, 10.xii.2012.
   
   **Diagnostic features:** Attains 8–10 cm. Body pale green with rectangular small and big orange spots which change to horizontal stripes in adults, a pair of black spots one on dorsal fin and another on upper tail base.
   
   **Habitat & Ecology:** Observed in mixed coral rubble areas, solitary.
   
   **Distribution:** East Africa to Andaman Sea, in Indonesia, and West Indian Ocean.
   
   **Remarks:** Juveniles pale greenish with orange spots, which change into 6–7 bright orange stripes in the adult.

**Discussion:** During this study six new records of fishes were observed under one order, three families, and four genera. According to the ichthyofauna checklist of Andaman & Nicobar Islands by Rao (2009), Ramakrishna et al. (2010) and Rajan et al. (2013), the fish species (*Cheilodipterus isostigma* (Schultz, 1940), *Cheilodipterus intermedius* Gon, 1993, *Ostorhinchus nigrofasciatus* Lachner, 1953, *Chlorurus capistratoides* (Bleeker, 1847), *Halichoeres richmondi* Fowler & Bean, 1928, and *Halichoeres cosmetus* Randall & Smith, 1982) were added to the list of ichthyofauna of these islands. The addition of these newly recorded fishes observed from the coral reef habitat of MGMNP, South Andaman, to the check list of ichthyofauna has resulted in a total of 1440 species under 580 genera belonging to 33 orders and 165 families.

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