

2.4 Family Ophidiidae

Family name: Ophidiidae Rafinesque (1810).

FAO name: Cusk-eels (in part).

Number of recognized genera: 48.

Diagnosis and description: Dorsal, caudal and anal fins confluent; **supramaxilla present**; dorsal-fin origin anterior to anal-fin origin; **dorsal-fin rays usually longer than opposing anal-fin rays**; body with scales; so far as known no vexillifer larval stage.

Key to subfamilies

- 1a. Barbels present on snout and chin **Brotulinae**
 1b. No barbels on snout and chin → 2
- 2a. Scales in form of small, non-imbricate prickles **Brotulotaeniinae**
 2b. Scales cycloid → 3
- 3a. Main body of ventral arm of cleithrum meeting its mate at about level of preopercle, but a slender, elongate filament of bone extends anteriorly to pelvic fins (Fig. 26a) inserted beneath eye; median basibranchial tooth patches present or absent . . **Ophidiinae**
 3b. Ventral arm of cleithrum meeting its mate and terminating at about level of preopercle or farther anteriorly, but the anteriorly directed bony filament is absent (Fig. 26b); pelvic-fin insertion variable in position but most often well posterior to eye, fin absent in a few species; 1 or more median basibranchial tooth patches (except absent in *Apagesoma* spp., 1 species of *Barathrites*, 2 species of *Bas-sozetus*, and 2 species of *Lamproprogrammus*) **Neobythiinae**

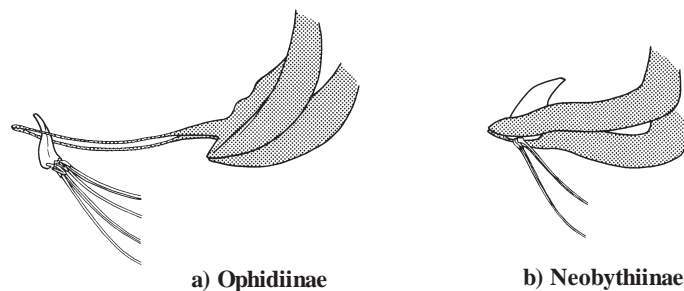


Fig. 26 Pelvic-fin support in 2 subfamilies of ophidiid fishes

2.4.1 Subfamily Brotulinae

Subfamily name: Brotulinae Swainson (1839).

Number of recognized genera: 1.

Diagnosis and description: See genus.

Brotula Cuvier, 1829

Type species: *Enchelyopus barbatus* Bloch *in* Bloch and Schneider, 1801 by monotypy.

Synonyms: *Nematobrotula* Gill, 1863a, type species *Brotula ensiformis* Günther, 1862; *Geneiates* Tickell *in* Day, 1888, type species *Geneiates ferruginosus* Tickell *in* Day, 1888.

Number of recognized species: About 5.

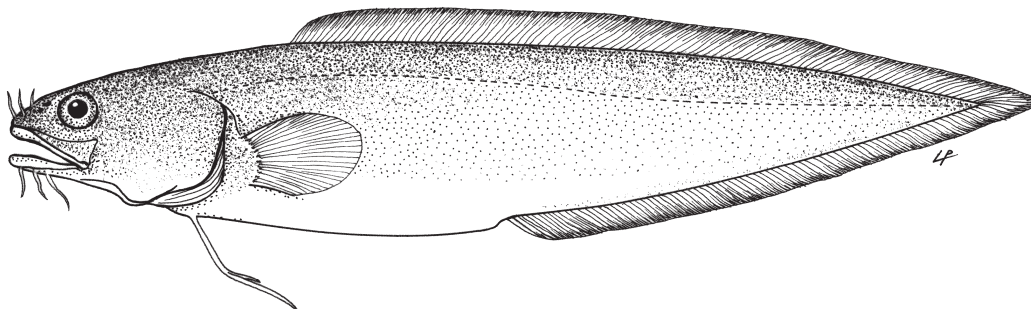


Fig. 27 *Brotula barbata*

Diagnosis and description: Body completely covered with small, imbricate, cycloid scales; **barbels present on snout (6) and chin (6)**; branchiostegal rays 8; median basibranchial tooth patch absent; developed gill rakers on first arch 4 or fewer; pelvic fin with 2 rays in each inserted at about level of preopercle, well behind eye.

Revisions: Hubbs (1944).

Geographical distribution: Around the world in tropical and subtropical seas.

Habitat and biology: Adults benthopelagic to 650 m and juveniles common on reefs. Smaller silvery specimens taken far out at sea in the epipelagic.

Interest to fisheries: Occasionally seen in markets, fresh, dried or salted.

Size: At least 750 mm.

Remarks: Additional research required to determine number of valid species. The descriptions of each of the many nominal species are based on very few specimens so both the inter- and intraspecific variation is poorly known.

Key to species: Not possible at present.

List of nominal species

Brotula barbata (Bloch *in* Bloch and Schneider, 1801). Tropical and subtropical Atlantic. Habits as for genus. Common.

B. burbonensis Kaup, 1858 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. clarkae Hubbs, 1944. Tropical eastern Pacific, Gulf of California to Peru. Habits as for genus. Occasionally caught.

B. ensiformis Günther, 1862 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. ferruginosus (Tickell, 1888) *in* Day, 1888 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. formosae Jordan and Evermann, 1902 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. japonica Steindachner and Döderlein, 1887 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. jayakari Günther, 1909 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. marginalis Jenkins, 1901 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. mülleri Günther, 1909 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. multibarbata Temminck and Schlegel, 1846. Red Sea and East Africa to Japan and Australia to Central Pacific. Habits as for genus. Common.

B. multicirrata Vaillant and Sauvage, 1875 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. ordwayi Hildebrand and Barton, 1949. Peru and Galapagos. Locally abundant.

B. palmietensis Smith, 1935 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944).

B. townsendi Fowler, 1900 (listed in synonymy of *B. multibarbata* by Hubbs, 1944; recognized by Gosline, 1953). Hawaii and Johnston Island. Uncommon. Matures at 46 cm.

Brotula barbata (Bloch *in* Bloch and Schneider, 1801)

Synonyms: None.

FAO names: **En** - Bearded brotula; **Fr** - Brotule barbé; **Sp** - Brótula de barbas.

Diagnosis and description: See generic diagnosis and description. All Atlantic *Brotula* specimens are referred to this species.

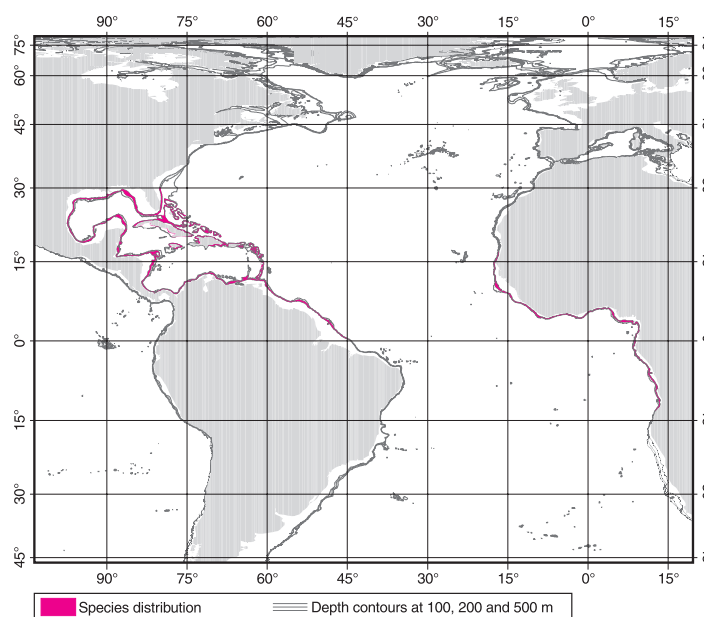
Geographical distribution: In tropical parts of both the West and the East Atlantic.

Habitat and biology: Benthopelagic on shelf and upper slope down to 600 m. Larvae found in the epipelagic far off shore.

Interest to fisheries: Of some commercial importance in several Central African countries, mainly Congo Rep., Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Mauritania. Landings by the latter countries' fleets in 1996 amounted to 368 t (total world catch). Catches principally occur on the continental shelf by means of trawling gears.

Local names: Not available.

Size: At least 75 cm and 4 kg.



Brotula multibarbata Temminck and Schlegel, 1846

Synonyms: See **List of nominal species** in generic section.

FAO names: **En** - Goatsbeard brotula; **Fr** - Brotule barbe-de-boue; **Sp** - Brótula barba de carnero.

Diagnosis and description: See generic diagnosis and description. All specimens from the Indian Ocean and the West Pacific are referred to this species.