

**A FIRST RECORD OF THE BENTHIC FORM OF  
*STYLOCHEILUS LONGICAUDA* (QUOY & GAIMARD,  
1824) (ANASPIDEA: APLYSIIDAE) FROM GUJARAT  
AND MAHARASHTRA ALONG THE MAINLAND  
WEST COAST OF INDIA**

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*Stylocheilus longicauda* (Quoy & Gaimard 1824) is a relatively small Sea Hare belonging to the family Aplysiidae. The species is widely distributed and circum-tropical (Indo-West Pacific & Atlantic) in distribution. It has been reported from India in the past from Lakshadweep (Apte 2009) and the Andaman group of islands (Sachithanandam et al. 2011) reported as *Stylocheilus striatus* (Quoy & Gaimard, 1832) which is now redesignated as the benthic form of *Stylocheilus longicauda* (Quoy & Gaimard, 1824) by Yonow in 2012.

The species is seasonally abundant; large congregations being common between October and March (Apte 2009; Yonow 2012). A significant feature of the animal is the longitudinal lines running across the body and scattered eye spots, either with pink or blue. The animal feeds on blue-green algae which form a mat or film over rocks or the surface of muddy and sandy shores (Yonow 2012). Like all aplysiid species, when disturbed, the animal releases a purple fluid from its body as an escape strategy (Bebbington 1974). The benthic form of *Stylocheilus longicauda* is usually seen in sea grass or seaweed beds (Yonow 2012).

**Study site:** The study was carried out at Ambolgad in Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra and Okha in the Gulf of Kachchh, Gujarat.

(a) Ambolgad is located (16°38'33.51"N & 73°19'20.57"E) on the west coast of India (Ratnagiri District) of Maharashtra along the Arabian Sea. Patchy reefs are present in the intertidal areas and occasionally at the sub-tidal depths. The shore at Ambolgad is dominated with numerous shallow rock pools.

(b) Okha is located (22°29'7.62"N & 69°4'1.31"E) in the state of Gujarat on the same west coast of India. The habitat is dominated by a rocky shore with abundant algal growth. The Gulf of Kachchh and the Marine National Park in and around Okha is known for its abundance of various species of corals and mollusca.

**Duration of the study:** On going work from April 2005 till date under AICOPTAX.

**Materials and Methods:** The direct search method was used to find the opisthobranchs by turning over rocks and boulders in the inter-tidal region. A few specimens were collected from each site and preserved in 95% ethyl alcohol and deposited in the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) opisthobranch collection.

**Results:** During the field work on 13 November 2009 along the Gulf of Kachchh, the author came across eight specimens of opisthobranchs on the rocky shore of Okha in Gujarat (Image 2). Again on 21 March 2012, a congregation of 77 individuals was observed in the shallow rock pool at Ambolgad in Maharashtra (Image 3).

**Size:** The specimens studied in the present work



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Image 1. *S. longicauda* from Lakshadweep Islands



Image 2. *S. longicauda* from Okha, Gujarat



Image 3. *S. longicauda* from Ambolgd, Ratnagiri, Maharashtra

ranged from 55–80 mm at Ambolgd while specimens from Okha ranged from 30–35 mm. These are known to grow up to 30mm. Rudman (1999) however reported animals from Zanzibar growing up to 65mm. Apte (2009) reported 30mm specimens from Lakshadweep (Image 1). The size of the specimens seen at Ambolgd is the largest among all the known records from India.

The present record of the benthic form of *S. longicauda* from Okha in Gujarat and Ambolgd in

Maharashtra is the first record from the mainland west coast of India.

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