

Family Terapontidae

Grunters

The family comprises approximately 60 species in 16 genera, endemic to the Indo-Pacific region. Grunters and sunfishes (see above) are classified within the order Centrarchiformes, which includes a diverse range of marine perch-like fish. Other freshwater perches in this order include the Sinipercidae and Percichthyidae. Grunters can be distinguished from superficially similar cichlids by a single continuous lateral line on the flank (vs. two lateral lines). Most grunters are marine, although some enter freshwater habitats for feeding. A few Australian species are freshwater residents. The name “grunker” is derived from the sound these fish produce, which is audible to humans. One species is known to enter freshwaters in West Asia regularly. **Further reading.** Nelson 2006 (diversity).

Terapon jarbua

Common name. Tiger perch.

Diagnosis. Only species of family entering freshwaters in West Asia. Distinguished from all perch-like fishes in coastal freshwaters in West Asia by: ● body silvery white with 3–4 black, curved stripes from nape to posterior back,

lowermost stripe continuing across middle of caudal / ● spinous part of dorsal with a blackish blotch on membranes between 3rd and 6th spines. Size up to 280 mm SL.

Distribution. Persian Gulf and coasts of Arabian Peninsula. Invasive in Mediterranean, where it entered via Suez Canal (Lessepsian migration). Not yet recorded from freshwaters in Mediterranean. Indo-Pacific from East African coast to South Africa, east to Samoa, north to southern Japan, south to Arafura Sea, Australia, and Lord Howe Island.

Habitat. Marine, postlarvae, and juveniles inhabit coastal habitats such as lower parts of rivers, lagoons, intertidal pools, and other coastal habitats. Inhabits soft bottoms with sand, silt, or organic material. Euryhaline, with a salinity tolerance of 0–39 ‰, usually found at depths down to 20 m but recorded down to 350 m. Catadromous, spawns at sea, juveniles migrate to coast or freshwater areas.

Biology. Protogynous, all juveniles are female, and sex reversal to male begins in many individuals when larger than 90 mm SL. Lives up to 10 years. Matures at about 120 mm SL. Fractional spawner, usually spawns throughout year. Eggs semipelagic. Larval stage about 25 days (Socotra). Postlarvae and juveniles enter brackish and freshwater habitats and may remain for two years, almost to maturity.



Terapon jarbua; Indonesia; ~80 mm SL. © B. MiggeArchiv Aqualog.

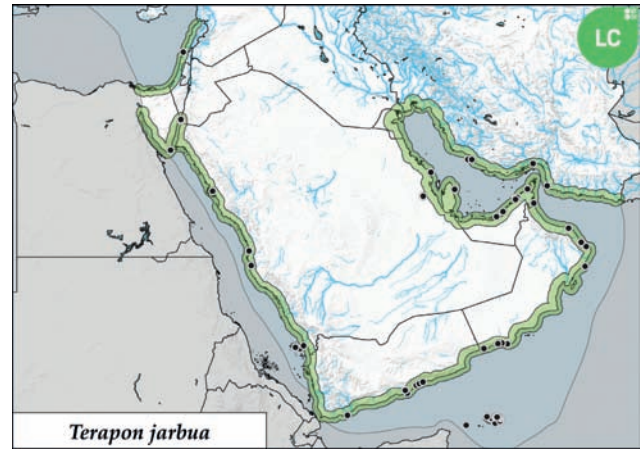
Adults only in sea. Juveniles usually live in schools, adults in loose groups or solitary. Juveniles feed mainly on invertebrates. Adults take invertebrates and small fish but feed mainly on scales removed from live fish. So far, only species known to be a specialised scale-eater in marine environments. Scales are only removed from live fish larger than predators, and slow-swimming species are preferred. Always attacks lateral surface of prey species, and scales are mainly removed from posterior region of body, particularly around caudal peduncle. A variety of species are attacked. Black longitudinal stripes fade during feeding but darken in presence of conspecifics, perhaps to prevent autopredation.

Remarks. Molecular data suggest that more than one species is involved, and populations from India to the east may belong to different species.

Conservation status. LC.

Further reading. Whitefield & Blaber 1978 (scale eating); Golani & Appelbaum-Golani 2010 (Mediterranean records).

Lavergne 2012 (biology, genetic diversity); Gupta & Banerjee 2016 (review of biology); Freyhof et al. 2020 (Arabian Peninsula).



Fish species used in aquaculture and the aquarium hobby, as this South American *Piaractus brachipomus*, are increasingly released in open waters in West Asia. As long as they are not stocked regularly or have build self-sustaining populations, they are not covered by this book.