

A new species of sponge-dwelling *Elacatinus* (Pisces: Gobiidae) from the western Caribbean

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Abstract

A new species of sponge-dwelling goby, *Elacatinus lori*, is described from Belize and Roatan Island, Honduras. It is distinguished from congeners by a terminal mouth position, thin white lateral stripe from the eye to the caudal peduncle and a thin white bar on the snout. It is the only shallow water sponge-dwelling *Elacatinus* in the Gulf of Honduras, appears to be endemic to that region, and has a mutually exclusive distribution from its apparent closest relatives.

Key words: Fish, goby, *Elacatinus lori*, new species, Belize, Honduras

Introduction

The western North Atlantic coral reef fishes of the genus *Elacatinus* generally live associated with stony corals or sponges. Böhlke and Robins (1968) published the first review of the group, describing 9 new species, in addition to 3 previously known, for a total of 12 recognized species. While they reduced *Elacatinus* to a subgenus of *Gobiosoma*, Eschmeyer and Bailey (1990) assigned generic status to *Elacatinus* and I follow their designation. Sazima et al. (1996) described a thirteenth species, *Elacatinus figaro*, from Brazilian waters.

In addition to their specialist associations, each species has a limited geographic range across the western Atlantic reef tract. Within nominal species there is often consistent geographic variation in the color of the lateral body stripe or head markings without other apparent morphological differences (Colin, 1975). These populations are considered color forms of a single morphologically identifiable species with each color form having its own distinct geographic distribution within the total range of the species. It is usually impossible to distinguish between color forms once preserved (Colin, 1975; Böhlke and Robins, 1968).