

Present Status of the Marine Aquarium Fishery in the Eastern Coast of Sri Lanka

I.P.T.P. Dhanasundara, E.P.D.N. Thilakarathne, P.C.B. Dias, K.P.U. T. Egodayana and P.K.T. Malshani

Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Animal Science and Export Agriculture, Uva Wellassa University, Badulla, Sri Lanka

Marine aquarium industry is a popular multimillionaire industry in the world and a considerable amount of global market is fulfilled by exporting from Sri Lanka since its beginning. Almost all marine ornamental species of Sri Lanka are collected from wild habitats which cause serious stock degradation of endemic and other marine species. The collection of marine ornaments has been establishing as a community-based industry on the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka due to high resource availability and accessibility compared to other regions; however, it is poorly documented. Therefore, a survey was designed to study the situation, threats, and issues of the industry on the East coast by using a questionnaire-based survey combined with field observations. Information was gathered from the collectors, suppliers, buyers, fisheries officers, and other relevant stakeholders. Almost 190 fish collectors and 15 suppliers are currently occupying during the southwestern monsoon period roughly from May to October in the Eastern coast. About 250 marine fish species (mainly butterflyfish, angelfish, damselfish, gobies, wrasses, surgeonfish, groupers, blennies & lionfish) and 50 marine invertebrate species (shrimps, Anemones, Sea Slugs & Sea lilies) are being collected mainly from Ottamavadi, Pasikudah, Kalkudah, Paul point, Adukkuparu, and Nilaweli reefs and rocky habitats. However, 01 - 05% of fish are discarding due to catching issues and 05 - 10% of caught fish are discarding due to improper handling, holding, and packing methods before reaching to local exporters. Dynamite fishing, overexploitation, fluctuations of price levels, mishandling of caught live forms, degradation of reef habitats due to natural and anthropogenic factors are the main identified threats so that the industry in the Eastern coast is certainly unsustainable. Therefore, it is highly recommended that a powerful management system should be rapidly established for the benefit of valuable marine ecosystems and the industry.

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