

## 15. Family: *Mastacembelidae*

### *Mastacembelus armatus*

*Mastacembelus armatus* is one of the largest species of spiny eels and, as such, is relatively easy for most fishermen to identify. The maximum size is somewhat more than 90 cm, which is larger than the 80 cm maximum size reported by Rainboth (1996).

All stations in the present survey identified the species. At many of the stations, this species is observed throughout the year. The abundance of *Mastacembelus armatus*, however, is highly variable, even between closely situated stations. In Cambodia, south of Kratie, fishermen reported that it is a rare species.

Some fishermen indicated that *Mastacembelus armatus* lives in crevices and under rocks in the Mekong mainstream during the dry season, but enters canals, lakes and other flood-plain areas during the flood season. The species was reported to develop eggs throughout the year, although most fishermen said they had observed eggs from April to June. One Thai fisherman reported observing spawning in a whirlpool during April-May, in which the eggs were adhered to filamentous algae. One fisherman in Viet Nam reported that *Mastacembelus armatus* spawns in ricefields.

### **Hypothesis:**

*Mastacembelus armatus* is a relatively stationary species that only undertakes short local migrations, and which has very strict habitat requirements (at least with regard to its dry-season habitat). In the dry season, it is only found in areas with a rocky bottom. Spawning also appears to take place in the habitat. During the flood season, part of the population moves to flood-plain habitats in the vicinity of the dry-season refuges, mainly to feed. Some individuals may also spawn on the flood plain.