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Rediscovery of *Mugilogobius chulae* (Smith, 1932) after 90 years and new goby records from northern Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Northern Sri Lanka, particularly the Jaffna Peninsula and adjacent island archipelago, has historically been underexplored due to decades of civil conflict, leaving significant gaps in knowledge of the regional fauna, including its freshwater and estuarine fishes. During a recent exploration of inland habitats in northern Sri Lanka, particularly on Karaitivu Island, we recorded two gobiid species from a tidal pool that could not be identified in the field. Detailed morphological examination of the collected specimens confirmed their identities. Here, we report the rediscovery of the Yellow-stripe Goby, *Mugilogobius chulae* (Smith, 1932), nearly 90 years after its sole historical record in Sri Lanka, following decades of absence and uncertainty in the literature. We also report the first verified northernmost record of the Black-spotted Snubnose Goby, *Pseudogobius melanosticta* (Day, 1876), in Sri Lanka, a species for which no recent verified records were available from the island. Our findings extend the known distributions of both species, contribute to the national ichthyofaunal inventory, and underscore the potential for further discoveries in the underexplored inland habitats of northern Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Goby, freshwater fish, Jaffna, discovery, Pseudogobius melanosticta*

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a tropical island in the Indian Ocean, spanning approximately 65,610 km² and situated between latitudes 5°55'–9°55' N and longitudes 79°41'–80°53' E. The island is renowned for its rich biodiversity and high levels of endemism and forms part of the Sri Lanka–Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot (Pethiyagoda and Sudasinghe, 2021; Myers et al., 2000). Each year, scientific explorations across the country lead to the discovery of new species and continue to reveal records of species previously thought to be extinct or absent from the island, particularly among the fish fauna (e.g., Pethiyagoda and Sudasinghe, 2021; Sudasinghe et al., 2024a–2024b). However, certain regions—particularly the northern part of the island, including the Jaffna Peninsula—remain comparatively underexplored and poorly studied in terms of both terrestrial and aquatic habitats, largely due to the three-decade-long civil war (Ganguly, 2018; Thiranagama, 2011) and the presence of landmines, which severely restricted field surveys in these areas even after the war ended. Only in recent years have researchers and naturalists resumed systematic exploration, revealing the region's considerable potential for new and noteworthy discoveries and taxonomic work (e.g., Deshaprema and Dissanayake, 2025).

Given this background, and driven by curiosity to explore the aquatic habitats of the region, particularly its inland fish fauna, two authors (J. B. and S. R.) conducted an expedition to the Jaffna Peninsula and its adjacent islands. During our exploration of inland freshwater and brackish-water habitats, we unexpectedly encountered two unidentified gobiid fish species at a remote site on an island connected to the peninsula, whose identities we were unable to verify in the field. Subsequent searches of nearby tidal pools, conducted with the assistance of local residents, resulted in the collection and photographic documentation of additional specimens. Detailed examination of the collected material later confirmed the rediscovery of the Yellow-stripe Goby, *Mugilogobius chulae* (Smith, 1932), nearly 90 years after its first and only record from Sri Lanka (Deraniyagala, 1936). In addition, we document the co-occurrence of the Black-spotted Snubnose Goby, *Pseudogobius melanosticta* (Day, 1876), a species for which no recent authenticated records exist from the island.

Here, we verify the identities of both species, provide voucher-supported morphological evidence, document their localities and habitats along with natural history information, and update their known distributions in Sri Lanka.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Site description and fieldwork

All specimens were collected from an inland pool (coordinates: 9.7543° N, 79.888466° E) in Karainagar, Karaitivu Island, on the Jaffna Peninsula coast, Northern Province, Sri Lanka (see Figure 1). Fieldwork was conducted over two days, from 03.03.2026 to 04.03.2026: on the first day in the evening (4:00 pm–6:00 pm) and on the following morning (8:00 am–12:00 pm). Fish were captured using two hand nets (net size: 35 cm × 35 cm; mesh sizes: ~2 mm × 2 mm and ~4 mm × 4 mm). Three specimens of *Mugilogobius chulae* and four specimens of *Pseudogobius melanosticta* were collected specifically as taxonomic voucher material to support species identification and documentation. Live specimens were photographed in the field using a Sony A7 IV camera equipped with a Sony FE 90 mm f/2.8 Macro G OSS lens and were subsequently euthanized using a clove oil mixture and preserved in 96% (v/v) ethanol solution.

To document the natural history and characterize the habitat, key water-quality parameters, including water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen (DO), total dissolved solids (TDS), and conductivity, were measured using a digital portable water-quality meter (HANNA multiparameter meter; Model HI98194). Salinity was measured using a refractometer. Habitat dimensions were recorded using a measuring tape with centimeter (cm) and meter (m) scale measurements. All the aforementioned water-quality parameters and habitat-dimension variables were measured once at the sampling site, with a single reading per variable, and were used solely as exploratory reference data.

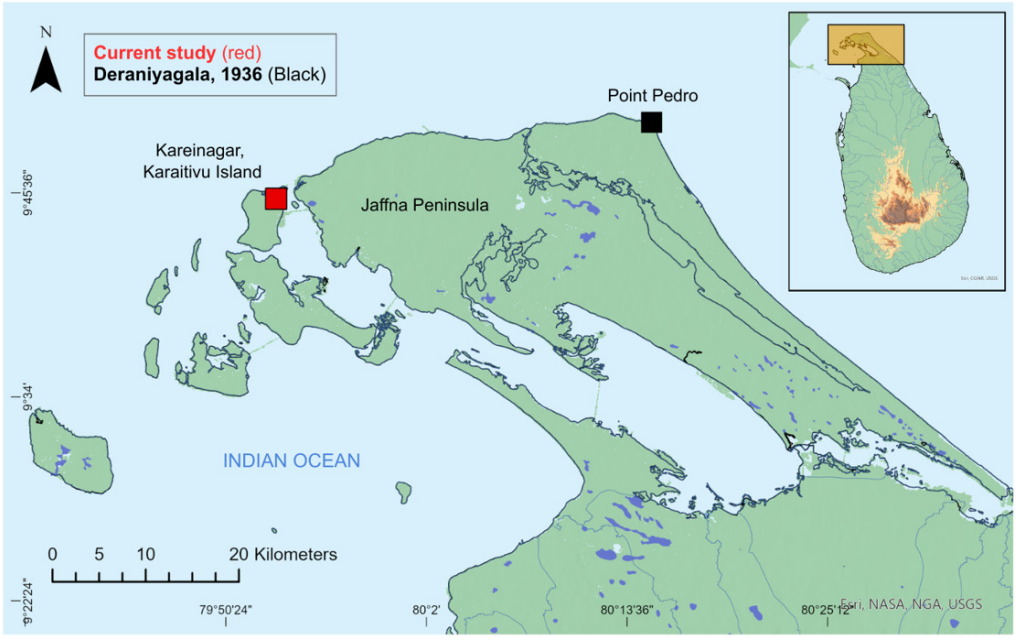

Figure 1. Map of the study area. Upper-right inset: map of Sri Lanka showing the Jaffna Peninsula and adjacent island archipelago (highlighted box). Red square, present discovery site at Karainagar, Karaitivu Island; black square, historical record from Point Pedro reported by Deraniyagala (1936).

Figure 2. Live coloration of the two species in the field: (A) *Mugilogobius chulae* (specimen CJB3305, 18.77 mm SL); and (B) *Pseudogobius melanosticta* (specimen CJB3304, 28.77 mm SL).

Morphological analysis

Upon returning to the laboratory, the preserved specimens were examined under a stereomicroscope at 10×, 16×, and 40× magnifications. Morphometric measurements and meristic counts were recorded following Daud et al. (2005) (Figure 3). Linear measurements included TL – total length, SL – standard length, HL – head length, HD – head depth, SNL – snout length, ED – eye diameter, PDL – predorsal length, D1L – first dorsal-fin length, D2L – second dorsal-fin length, PFL – pectoral-fin length, AFL – anal-fin length, CFL – caudal-fin length, CPL – caudal-peduncle length, and LLS – lateral scale count. All measurements were taken from the left lateral side of the specimens using point-to-point linear measurements with a digital vernier caliper to the nearest 0.01 mm. Dentition was examined without dissection using a magnifying glass, with the mouth opened using forceps. For species identification, we initially followed the identification guide by Rainboth (1996) and subsequently confirmed the identifications using the works of Larson and Hammer (2021) and Larson (2001). Sex was determined based on external morphological characters described in the respective taxonomic descriptions (Larson and Hammer 2021; Larson 2001). For instance, individuals exhibiting filamentous elongated dorsal-fin rays were identified as adult males.

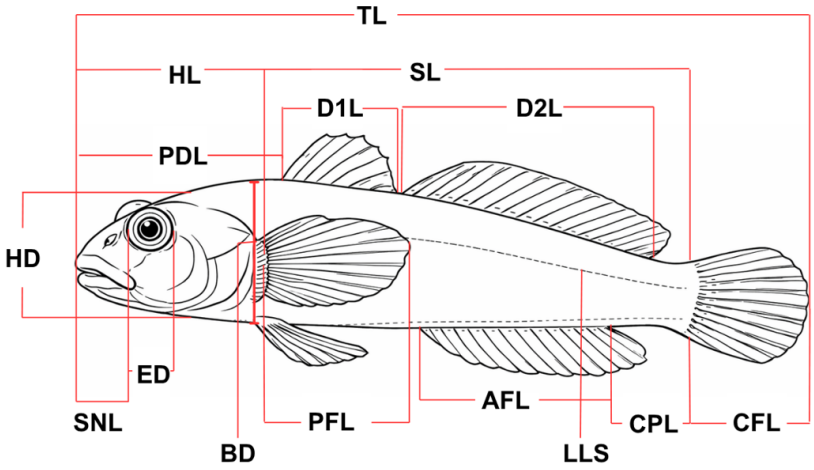

Figure 3. Morphometric measurements of the specimens, illustrated using a generic goby (abbreviations as defined in the Morphological Analysis section).

Distributional records

Occurrence data for the identified species were obtained from the iNaturalist database (www.inaturalist.org; iNaturalist, 2026), the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) database (https://www.gbif.org; GBIF.org, 2026), and verified published academic records. Georeferenced maps were prepared using ArcGIS Pro software with the WGS 84 coordinate system and a spatial reference scale of 1:536,871 (basemap source: Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS).

RESULTS

Mugilogobius chulae (Smith, 1932)

Diagnosis. Morphometric data of the examined specimens are summarized in Table 1, and the general appearance is shown in Figure 2a. The body is compressed and slender anteriorly. The head is slightly depressed (25.68–31.12% SL, mean 27.87%), with large dorsolateral eyes (25.15–27.39% HL, mean 25.92%). The snout is short and rounded (19.63–22.95% HL, mean 21.66%). The mouth is subterminal, bearing smooth, fleshy lips. Body depth ranges from 18.20–21.42% SL (mean 19.43%). The caudal peduncle is compressed, with a length of 18.53–22.43% SL (mean 20.05%). The pectoral fins are oval, while the pelvic fins are short and rounded; the caudal fin is also rounded. The second dorsal fin originates opposite the origin of the anal fin. There are 28–29 lateral scales. The first dorsal fin bears six spines, whereas the second dorsal and anal fins each possess one spine and seven soft rays. The pectoral fins have 15 rays, and the caudal fin contains 14–15 rays. All specimens had short, sharp, pointed teeth arranged in rows, with three rows in the upper jaw and three to four rows in the lower jaw.

Coloration in life. The body is golden-yellow, with the ventral surface becoming white. Six black transverse bars are present across the lateral side of the body. A distinct pair of black spots is present at the caudal base. The first dorsal fin bears a dense black spot extending from the third to the sixth dorsal spine on the posterior half of the fin.

After preservation. The fins become hyaline, and the body becomes pale-whitish; the black pigmentation and transverse bars remain visible.

Pseudogobius melanosticta (Day, 1876)

Diagnosis. Morphometric data of the examined specimens are summarized in Table 1, and the general appearance is illustrated in Figure 2b. The body is elongated and cylindrical anteriorly, becoming slightly compressed toward the posterior half. The head is slightly depressed, measuring 24.19–28.19% SL (mean 26.25%). The mouth is subterminal, and the eyes are positioned dorsolaterally, measuring 23.39–37.98% HL (mean 28.75%). The snout is characteristically steep and rounded, comprising 22.55–26.01% HL (mean 24.03%). Body depth is 18.95–20.92% SL (mean 20.04%). The caudal peduncle is compressed, with a length of 25.03–35.00% SL (mean 29.64%). The first dorsal fin is triangular and pointed. Male specimens (n = 2) exhibit elongate spines in the first three elements of the first dorsal fin. The second dorsal fin is relatively tall, nearly reaching the height of the first dorsal fin, with a curved (non-pointed) distal margin. The pectoral and pelvic fins are oval in shape, while the anal fin is rounded posteriorly. The caudal fin is large and rounded. There are 25 lateral scales. The first dorsal fin bears six spines, whereas the second dorsal and anal fins each possess one spine and seven soft rays. The pectoral fins contain 15 rays, and the caudal fin contains 15 rays. All examined specimens had small, caniniform,

sharp-tipped teeth arranged in two rows in the lower jaw and two to three rows in the upper jaw.

Coloration in life. The head and body are greyish with a yellowish tint. Numerous small, dark-brown spots are scattered along the scale rows. A more distinct mid-lateral band is present, formed by a series of five blackish blotches overlying the brown spots on the body. Just below the eye, the cheek region bears a distinct black, "tear"-like mark extending downward from the eye. The iris is reddish-gold. Bright blue pigmentation is observed on the operculum. A distinct black-and-yellow colour pattern is present on the first dorsal fin.

After preservation. The fins become hyaline, and the body becomes pale-whitish; the black pigmentation and spots remain visible.

Material

Mugilogobius chulae, 3, CJB3305, 18.77 mm SL; CJB3306, 14.14 mm SL; CJB3307, 18.24 mm SL. *Pseudogobius melanosticta*, 4, CJB3301, unsexed, 29.06 mm SL; CJB3302, male, 27.60 mm SL; CJB3303, female, 23.25 mm SL; CJB3304, male, 28.77 mm SL. All specimens were collected from Karainagar (9.7543° N, 79.888466° E), Karaitivu Island, by Janamina Bandara. Specimens are now deposited in the fin-fish collection (catalogued under their respective species names with the same voucher information) of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Sciences and Technology, University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka.

Table 1. Morphometric measurements of the examined specimens of the two species.

	***Mugilogobius chulae* (n = 3)**		***Pseudogobius melanosticta* (n = 4)**	
	Range	**Mean ± S. D**	**Range**	**Mean ± S. D**
Total length (TL) mm	18.14-23.18	21.28 ± 2.74	28.39-35.63	33.53 ± 3.44
Standard length (SL) mm	14.14-18.77	17.05 ± 2.53	23.25-29.06	27.17 ± 2.69
Lateral scale count (LLS)	28-29		25	
In percent of SL				
Head length (HL)	25.68-31.12	27.87 ± 2.87	24.19-28.19	26.25 ± 2.03
Body depth (BD)	18.20-21.42	19.43 ± 1.74	18.95-20.92	20.04 ± 0.94
Pre-dorsal length (PDL)	40.01-45.54	42.26 ± 2.91	31.45-33.82	32.88 ± 1.14
Length of 1st dorsal fin (D1L)	15.41-20.25	17.82 ± 2.42	18.11-22.68	20.12 ± 1.92
Length of 2nd dorsal fin (D2L)	14.01-19.94	17.31 ± 3.02	19.22-27.79	23.97 ± 3.60
Pectoral fin length (PFL)	18.80-21.47	20.54 ± 1.51	11.80-28.12	21.69 ± 7.33
Anal fin length (AFL)	16.68-21.22	18.44 ± 2.43	16.30-22.92	18.92 ± 2.89
Caudal fin length (CFL)	23.41-28.29	25.06 ± 2.79	21.24-27.61	23.38 ± 2.87
Caudal peduncle length (CPL)	18.53-22.43	20.05 ± 2.09	25.03-35.00	29.64 ± 4.13
In percent of HL				
Head depth (HD)	52.05-61.20	56.77 ± 4.59	64.55-75.82	71.09 ± 5.57
Snout length (SNL)	19.63-22.95	21.66 ± 1.78	22.55-26.01	24.03 ± 1.48
Eye diameter (ED)	25.15-27.39	25.92 ± 1.27	23.39-37.98	28.75 ± 6.40

DISCUSSION

Comparative remarks

Mugilogobius chulae (Smith, 1932). Larson (2001) noted that the species appears similar to *Mugilogobius wilsoni* Larson, 2001. However, *M. wilsoni* is geographically allopatric to *M. chulae* and is restricted to northern Australia. In addition, a highly diagnostic character is the pattern on the first dorsal fin. In *M. wilsoni*, the dark spot is positioned between the second and fourth spines, whereas in *M. chulae* it occupies the region between the third and sixth spines. In all examined specimens, the dark spot begins at the third spine, consistent with *M. chulae*. Another key distinguishing feature in our material is the presence of filamentous first dorsal-fin spines. Larson (2001) showed that the first dorsal spines in *M. wilsoni* are never filamentous, in contrast to *M. chulae*.

Another possible species is *Mugilogobius fuscus* (Herre, 1940), which resembles *M. chulae* in general appearance (Larson, 2001). A clear distinguishing feature between these species is the colour pattern: *M. chulae* exhibits 'conspicuous oblique bars', whereas *M. fuscus* has a plain, reticulate brown body pattern. None of our specimens showed a reticulate brown body pattern; instead, all displayed six distinct black bars along the lateral side, further supporting their identification as *M. chulae*.

We consider our *M. chulae* specimens to be juveniles based on their small size (14.14–18.77 mm SL, mean 17.05 mm), compared with the reported adult size of approximately 38.5 mm SL in Larson (2001). This interpretation is further supported by the absence of elongate first dorsal-fin spines, which ar e typically present in mature adults.

Pseudogobius melanosticta (Day, 1876). This species, on the other hand, unlike *M. chulae*, is comparatively very distinct from its congeners. Larson and Hammer (2021) show that it can be readily identified by its diagnostic first dorsal-fin colour pattern, the presence of elongate fin spines in males, a usually steep, rounded snout, a generally spotted body colour pattern, and a distinct black "tear"-like mark extending from the eye across the cheek. The morphometrics align well with the reported ranges for the species given by Larson and Hammer (2021), and the aforementioned characteristics further support our identification of the species.

Rediscovery of *Mugilogobius chulae* after 90 years

The first and only historical record of this species in Sri Lanka originates from P. E. P. Deraniyagala (1936), who described a freshwater goby as *Vaimosa valigouva*, now considered a junior synonym of *Mugilogobius chulae* (Smith, 1932) following taxonomic revisions (Larson, 2001) (see Figure 4). Deraniyagala noted that the holotype was deposited at the Natural History Museum, London (BMNH 1936.4.23.1), with its type locality at Point Pedro, Jaffna, approximately 20–22 km from the current study site, although he did not specify the location of the paratype. Later, Pethiyagoda (1991) acknowledged this species

in his work *Freshwater Fishes of Sri Lanka,* referring to Deraniyagala's description and noting an uncatalogued specimen at the National Museum of Sri Lanka, likely the paratype.

However, due to the civil conflict in the northern regions, particularly in the Jaffna Peninsula, field surveys were largely impossible because of security concerns and uncleared landmines. As a result, the species remained unconfirmed in subsequent assessments and has not been recorded from other parts of the island, remaining absent from recent academic records (i.e., Sudasinghe, 2023; Goonatilake et al., 2020; De Silva et al., 2015; Kumara and Dalpathadu, 2012). Now, 17 years after the end of the civil war and nearly 90 years after Deraniyagala's initial record, the present study documents the most recent confirmed occurrence of *M. chulae* in Sri Lanka, representing a significant rediscovery of the species.

Mugilogobius chulae is primarily distributed across the eastern Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and the western Pacific (Froese and Pauly, 2026; GBIF.org, 2026), and has also been reported from several Indian Ocean localities, including the Andaman Islands (Praveenraj et al., 2025), in addition to Sri Lanka. To our knowledge, this record represents one of the westernmost occurrences of the species in the Indian Ocean.

As per available records of the genus Mugilogobius from Sri Lanka, none of the species reported by Larson (2001) are included in the IUCN marine checklist (Kumara and Dalpathadu, 2012) or in recent literature. Larson (2001) also reported *Mugilogobius rambaiae* (Smith, 1945) and Mugilogobius mertoni (Weber, 1911), in addition to M. fuscus (recorded from the mouth of the Mahaweli River, west side of the road, Trincomalee) and *M. chulae,* as historical records from Sri Lanka.

Pseudogobius melanosticta from Sri Lanka

P. melanosticta is a widespread goby species across the tropical Indo-Pacific region, typically inhabiting freshwater and brackish environments, with adults occasionally venturing into marine waters. In Sri Lanka, however, its presence has been poorly documented, with only a few scattered historical records, frequent misidentifications, and few verified occurrences (Larson and Hammer, 2021), which has led to its exclusion from the most recent national IUCN Red List assessments (Goonatilake et al., 2020; Kumara and Dalpathadu, 2012). The earliest known record originates from Duncker's 1909 collection from Panadura Lagoon, now housed at the Zoological Museum Hamburg (ZMH 19309; reported by Larson and Hammer, 2021). Subsequent records include specimens from Sri Lankan estuaries collected by C. C. Koenig (USNM 316198, now at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History) and from Negombo Lagoon (CMK 7049; reported by Larson and Hammer, 2021). Our record represents the first confirmed report from the northern part of the island, whereas previous records were restricted to the western coast and estuarine habitats of Sri Lanka.

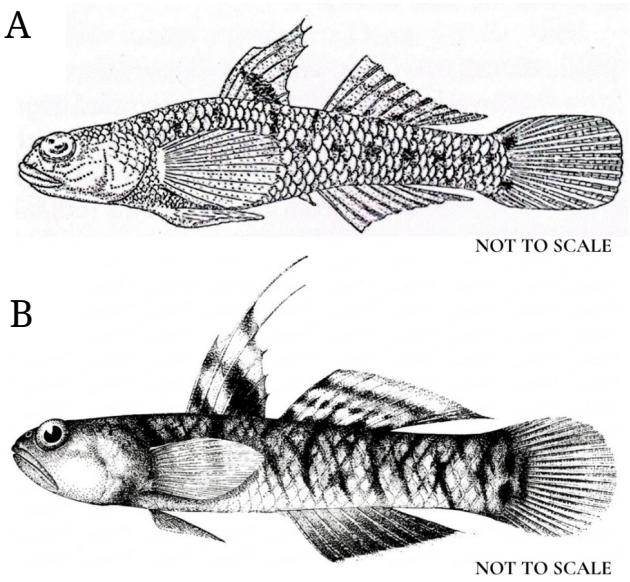

Figure 4. Historical descriptions of *Mugilogobius chulae* (Smith, 1932). (a) Illustration of *Vaimosa valigouva* Deraniyagala, 1936 (junior synonym of *M. chulae*) from the original description by P. E. P. Deraniyagala, reproduced by Pethiyagoda (1991) (photo courtesy of Rohan Pethiyagoda). (b) Reproduced illustration of *Vaimosa chulae* (later placed in the genus Mugilogobius), referring to the original illustration by Smith (1932) in the original description of the species.

Note on natural history

Both goby species were recorded from a fragmented lentic pool (approximately 7–8 m in width and 35–40 cm in depth) within the tidal flat (see Figure 5a–d). The substrate consisted of silty sand and gravel with scattered debris, and the habitat was open, with little to no shade. Physicochemical parameters indicated slightly turbid water, with a pH of 8.5, dissolved oxygen (DO) of 6.5 mg L^{-1}, water temperature of 31.0 °C, total dissolved solids (TDS) of 3018 ppm, conductivity of 6421 µS cm^{-1}, and salinity of ~15 ppt, indicating brackish conditions. Co-occurring species included the euryhaline cyprinid Bhava vittata (Day, 1865), the native beloniform Oryzias carnaticus (Jerdon, 1849), and the exotic perciform Oreochromis niloticus (Linnaeus, 1758), the last of which is commonly harvested by local communities for consumption.

Initial sampling was conducted during high tide in the evening (03.03.2026, ~16:00 h), one day after the full moon. During this survey, only a single individual of *Mugilogobius chulae* and approximately 6–7 individuals of *Pseudogobius melanosticta* were observed. On the following day (04.03.2026), at low tide, approximately 15–20 individuals of *P. melanosticta* were recorded during a morning search (around 10:30 h), whereas only three individuals of *M. chulae* were observed along a 20m stretch of the tidal pool.

We speculate that individuals may also exhibit amphidromous movements associated with tidal fluctuations, given that such diadromous behaviours are well documented in this species and related gobiid taxa (Froese and Pauly, 2026; McDowall, 1997). However, these observations are preliminary and based on limited sampling. Further long-term and seasonal studies are needed to evaluate abundance patterns, population structure, habitat use, and the conservation status of these species.

Figure 5. Discovery location and habitat. (A, B) Bird's-eye views of the discovery site, showing the tidal-flat pool and the adjacent lagoon; (C) Habitat of *Mugilogobius chulae* and *Pseudogobius melanosticta*; (D) During the first field observation of the two species.

CONCLUSION

This study documents the presence of two gobiid species, *Mugilogobius chulae* and *Pseudogobius melanosticta*, in the Jaffna Archipelago of northern Sri Lanka, representing previously unreported occurrences for this region and enriching the national ichthyofaunal record. The rediscovery of *M. chulae* nearly 90 years after its original record, from a locality close to its historically known range, is particularly significant, while the confirmation of *P. melanosticta* provides evidence of its continued presence in Sri Lankan waters despite the lack of recent verified records. As a future direction, molecular-level confirmation of the species identities is encouraged. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of conducting renewed surveys in underexplored regions, enhancing our understanding of Sri Lanka's fish diversity, and informing future monitoring and conservation efforts for freshwater and brackish ecosystems.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

J. B. and S. R. conducted the fieldwork and curated the data; J. B. and A. M. performed the analyses and species identification; J. B. prepared the draft manuscript with assistance from A. M. All authors contributed to revising the manuscript drafts and approved the final version for publication.

DECLARATION

Informed consent statement

The collection of specimens did not require institutional animal ethics approval. Neither of the species studied is listed among the protected fish species in Schedule VI of the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance (FFPO) of Sri Lanka, and fieldwork was conducted outside protected areas (PAs); therefore, no collection permit was required. Furthermore, both species are currently listed as Least Concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List and are not listed under CITES. Except for the specimens retained as vouchers, all captured fish were immediately released into their natural habitat. Prior to preservation, retained specimens were euthanized using clove oil as an appropriate anesthetic.

Conflicting interests

The authors have no conflict of interest related to this study

AI Declaration

The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) or AI assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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