

BOOK REVIEW



A Precursor of the Fishes of the Indian Archipelago. Part 1 Siluri. P. Bleeker, van Oijen, M. J. P., G. M. P. Loots & F. J. G. Limburg, 2009. *Zoologische Mededelingen*, **83**: I–XI, 1–317. ISSN 0024-1652. ISBN 978-90-6391-004; no 83.



An Illustrated Translation of Bleeker's Fishes of the Indian Archipelago Part II Cyprini. van Oijen, M. J. P. & G. M. P. Loots, 2012. *Zoologische Mededelingen*, **86**: 1–469. ISSN 0024-0672. ISBN 978-90-6519-003-1.

The Dutch medical doctor and ichthyologist Pieter Bleeker undoubtedly has exerted the greatest influence on the study of Indo-Pacific fishes, having authored 518 articles, and described more genera (520) and new species (1,925) than any other

ichthyologist. Although he did publish a few works in English, the bulk of his work was written in French, Dutch, and Latin, including his crowning achievement, the *Atlas Ichthyologique des Indes Orientales Néerlandaises*, that was issued in nine volumes between 1862 and 1877.

Before the publication of his Atlas, Bleeker had intended to publish a series of reviews of the fish fauna of the East Indies (viz. Sundaic Southeast Asia), with each volume focusing on a single taxon and intending to be both a compilation of his earlier papers, as well as a primer for his opus magnus (the Atlas). Two volumes of the “Precursor of the Fishes of the (East) Indian Archipelago” (literal translation of the Latin title “Ichthyologiae Archipelagi Indici Prodomus”) were published, before Bleeker decided to focus his attention on

the publication of the Atlas (although he continued to publish smaller revisionary studies that served as primers for his Atlas). The first volume dealt with the catfishes (Siluriformes) and the second with the carps and loaches (Cypriniformes) and egg-laying tooth carps (Cyprinodontiformes) [combined into the artificial assemblage known as “Cyprini”].

Both volumes began with critical reviews of the systematic work on the respective taxa by both earlier ichthyologists as well as contemporaries, concluding with a short account on the zoogeography of the groups. Accounts for 99 species of catfishes in Volume 1, and accounts for 130 species of cypriniform and cyprinodontiform fishes in Volume 2 then follow, preceded by a short account of the higher-level classification of the group. The diagnostic keys, genera and species descriptions for each account were written in Latin, while the other portions of the work (e.g., distinguishing characters, data on species distribution, stomach contents, and fisheries) were written in Dutch. The Dutch portions of the species accounts are of greatest interest to systematic ichthyologists, since they contain information on type specimens (that would greatly aid the identification of type specimens in the Bleeker collection) mentioned neither in the original species descriptions nor in the Atlas.

The authors/translators are to be commended for making these two important works more accessible to readers, particularly those without a working knowledge of Dutch or Latin. Both volumes of the Prodomus were published as single-volume articles (in the *Acta Societas Scientiarum Indo-Neerlandicae*) and as separate books; the translations are based on the book versions. In order to enhance the value of the translation as a systematic reference, the authors have included the pagination of the original books (in grey rectangles throughout the text), as well as included the original illustrations from the Atlas. Bleeker had intended the illustrations to be used in the Prodomus, but the limited printing facilities available in Batavia (where the two volumes of the Prodomus were published) precluded this possibility. The plates from the Atlas have therefore been included here for completeness and easy reference. It is worth noting that the fishes were illustrated life-size in the Atlas (unless they were larger than the page size). Given that the figures were reduced in size in both translations, it would have been useful to readers intending to use this work as a systematic reference to indicate the original size of the figures (in order to identify if the type specimens might have been illustrated). This has been done in the translation of the second volume but not the first.

The text has been translated literally in many places, but things like the Dutch common names are probably best left in their original form, as translating them into English renders some very strange-sounding names (e.g., “high-finned liptooth fish” for the catfish *Bagrichthys hypselopterus*). The Dutch names have been included in the translation of the second volume, but not the first. Moreover, translating the text literally leads to some awkward-sounding sentences that the reader might take some time in fully comprehending (e.g., “The pattern of bars, although in general terms constantly similar, in the various specimens offers numerous gradations regarding the width, connection and extension of the bars” in the account of *Bagroides melanopterus* [= *Bagroides melapterus*]). Some of the terms used could also be better translated (e.g., “Sundaic” instead of “Sundanic”).

These minor issues with the figures and translation, particularly for Volume 1, do not detract from the overall utility of these two tomes, and they should grace the shelves of anyone working on Indo-Pacific fishes or interested in the history of ichthyology.

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