



**Fishes of Laos.** Kottelat, M., 2001. WHT Publications (Pte) Ltd, Sri Lanka. 198 pp. ISBN 955-9114-25-5.

The fish fauna of the Lao People's Democratic Republic consists of primary freshwater varieties and euryhaline species that can live for extended periods in freshwater. Most of Laos is drained by the Mekong basin, and none of the country's boundaries is anywhere near the sea. This book reports on 481 species of fish from the country, a dramatic increase from 210 species known in 1975. The author himself recorded more than 100 species for the first time in the past six years while doing fieldwork for this book. It is of interest to note that loaches of the genus *Schistura* are incredibly diverse there. With 57 species, they make up over 10% of the country's fish fauna. Many of them are also endemic to Laos.

All species of fish recorded to date from Laos are illustrated, and their diagnostic characters are provided in the book. Information on the geographic distribution, habitats, and previous misidentifications is also included for every species. Although English vernacular names are provided for the families, species nomenclature is

restricted to scientific names. This is because most of the species have no English or even Laotian names. Most of the local vernacular names are used only in a given region and are unknown elsewhere; or the same name is used for different species in different areas. The scientific name of each species is the latest one known to the author, but older names and synonyms, where present, are listed as well.

The fauna is presented in phylogenetic order, but the level of classification only goes as high as family. Identification keys are included for all families with several genera. The picture and text of each species are correspondingly numbered, and both sets can easily be traced to each other. It would have been more convenient for the user if all pictures and text are on pages facing each other, but this will probably be too troublesome to format.

Even though the book lacks pictures of live fish in their natural habitat, most of the photographs feature fresh and well-preserved specimens that accurately depict their general appearance and colour markings. They should enable anyone to identify the fishes in the quickest way, even without reading the text. Also useful are the simple line drawings that are distributed throughout the book. By no means works of art, they, nevertheless, clearly and effectively illustrate morphological characters that may not be adequately described in words.

This book is designed as a tool for the education of the Lao people on the fish diversity of their country. It is also a comprehensive reference for anyone interested in the fish fauna of the Indochinese region thanks to its extensive list of literature references. It serves its intended purpose as a practical guide to the fishes of Laos most admirably for it is not bulky or pretty enough to stop many people from using it in the field.

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