

Fish community assemblages in relation to environmental variables in the Lefini River, middle Congo River basin (Republic of Congo)

by

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Abstract. – This study, one of the few ecological investigations of fishes recently performed in Africa, was undertaken in the Lefini River basin, a large right bank affluent of the Congo River in the Republic of Congo. The study area comprised 12 ecological stations, spread along 103 km of the river. Each station was sampled eight times over a two-year period, with fishing following standardized methods utilizing five monofilament gill nets of 10, 12, 15, 20 and 30 mm mesh size. Eighteen environment variables were also measured at each station. A total of 8,698 specimens, including 84 species belonging to 51 genera, 21 families, was reported. Redundancy Analysis with forward selection coupled with Monte Carlo permutation tests identified three variables (temperature, canopy closure, and canopy height) as accounting for 36.9% of the total variance ($p < 0.05$). The contribution of the two first axes was significant ($F = 1,56$; $p = 0.02$). Fish populations are distributed according to five habitat types: pool with fringing grasses; river bank with grass; forest with high canopy coverage 60.0-67.0%; forest with mean canopy coverage 33.0-48.0%; and forest with low canopy coverage 24.0%. The index of species richness “S” showed the grassy habitat to be the least diversified but overall, the high value of H' (2.64-3.24) and R (0.73-0.83) indices in all stations, indicates that the examined stretch of the Lefini basin is in good ecological health.

Résumé. – Distribution des communautés des poissons en relation avec les variables de l’environnement dans la rivière Léfini, bassin du Moyen Congo (République du Congo).

La présente étude, l’une des rares investigations sur l’écologie des poissons entreprises en Afrique, a été réalisée dans le bassin de la rivière Léfini, un grand affluent de la rive droite du fleuve Congo en République du Congo. L’étude a été menée dans 12 stations écologiques, réparties sur 103 km le long de la rivière. Chaque station a été échantillonnée huit fois en deux ans, suivant une méthode de pêches standardisées à l’aide des filets maillants monofilaments de 10, 12, 15, 20 et 30 mm de côté de maille. Dix-huit variables de l’environnement ont été mesurées au niveau de chaque station prospectée. Un total de 8698 spécimens, appartenant à 84 espèces, 51 genres et 21 familles, ont été reportés. L’Analyse Canonique de Redondance avec sélection préalable, couplée au test de permutation de Monte Carlo (999 itérations) a identifié 3 variables (température, couverture de la canopée et hauteur de la canopée) exprimant à elles seules 36,9% de la variance totale ($p < 0,05$). La contribution des deux premiers axes a été significative ($F = 1,56$; $p = 0,02$). Les populations de poissons sont distribuées suivant cinq types d’habitats : vasque bordée d’herbes ; rive bordée d’herbes ; forestier à grande couverture de la canopée 60,0-67,0% ; forestier à moyenne couverture de la canopée 33,0-48,0% et forestier à faible couverture de la canopée 24,0%. Les indices de la richesse spécifique “S” ont montré la faible diversification des stations herbeuses. Cependant, les valeurs élevées des indices de Shannon H' (2,64-3,24) et d’équitabilité R (0,73-0,83), dans l’ensemble des stations, indiquent que le tronçon examiné dans le bassin de la rivière Léfini est en bonne santé écologique.

Key words

Fish
Ecology
Lefini River
Middle Congo
Africa

Understanding fish-habitat relationships is essential for the sustainable management and conservation of riverine fishes (Wildhaber *et al.*, 2000; Fischer and Paukert, 2008; Paugy and Lévêque, 2017). Aquatic ecosystems throughout the African continent are increasingly being impacted by human activities, such as industrial deforestation, dam-construction for irrigation and hydropower, overfishing, and pollution (Kamdem Toham and Teugels, 1999; Aboua *et al.*, 2015; Paugy and Lévêque, 2017). The consequences of such

activities potentially endanger the biological integrity of these ecosystems and the diversity of their ichthyofaunas.

The main goal of fish community ecology is to understand the mechanisms and the processes responsible for differences and similarities between the fish assemblages (Angermeier and Karr, 1983). One of the most important functions of such ecological studies is to gain an understanding of the spatial and temporal patterns in both the structure of communities and the size and distribution of popula-

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tions (Ornellas and Coutinho, 1998). Thus, the monitoring of populations is an essential step for informing management of aquatic ecosystems (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2010). The study of fish populations based on estimates of abundance has been the subject of many ecological studies (*e.g.* Paugy and Bénech, 1989; Laë, 1994; Blanchard, 2001; Lobry *et al.*, 2003; Munyandorero, 2006; Tejerina-Garro *et al.*, 2006). However, investigations of the drivers of fish community assemblages are rarely performed in Africa (Kouamélan *et al.*, 2003; Kouadio *et al.*, 2006). The few available studies have mostly been undertaken in West Africa (Mérona, 1981; Hugué, 1989, 1990; Pouilly, 1993; Kouamélan *et al.*, 2003; Yao *et al.*, 2005; Kouadio *et al.*, 2006; Aboua *et al.*, 2015), South Africa (Hay *et al.*, 1996) and Central Africa in the Lower Guinean ichthyofaunal province (Kamdém Toham and Teugels, 1997, 1998; Mbega, 2004; Ibanez *et al.*, 2007) and recently in the Congo Basin (Ibala Zamba, 2010; Wamuini Lunkayi Lakio *et al.*, 2010).

In order to contribute to the knowledge of community structure and diversity of the Congo Basin ichthyofauna, the present study was undertaken in the Lefini River basin. In this study, the spatial distribution of the Lefini fish community was investigated, the main environmental variables associated with species assemblages was determined and the ecological health of the river highlighted.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study area

Fish samples were collected in the Lefini River, a large right bank affluent of the Congo River, entirely located within the Republic of Congo. The Lefini River Basin is situated approximately at 200 km to the north of Brazzaville, on the Bateke plateau, in the heart of the Republic of Congo. With a main-channel total length of around 290 km, the Lefini River basin covers an area of 13000 km² and drains both the Lefini Faunal Reserve and the Lesio-Louna Gorilla Natural Reserve.

Fish sampling

A total of 12 ecological stations were sampled, six of which were of a grass bank type (stations 1, 4, 5, 6, 10 and 11) and the other six of a forest bank type (stations 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 12) (Appendix I). These extended along a stretch of 103 km of the Lefini River and were distributed over three zones, situated respectively upstream, within, and downstream of the Lesio-Louna Gorilla Natural Reserve (Fig. 1). Each station was sampled eight times over a two-year period from March 2007 to August 2008 (see details in appendix I), in a standardized way using five monofilament gill nets, each 30 m long and 1.5 m deep, with 10, 12, 15, 20 and 30 mm mesh size. At each sampling station, gill nets were

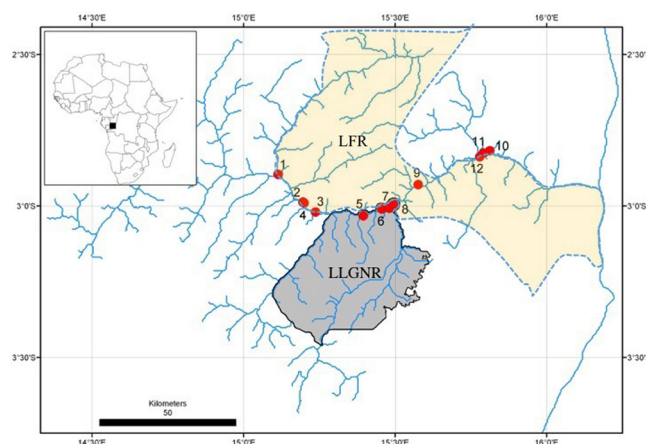


Figure 1. – Sampling stations (1-12). Grass bank stations: 1, 4, 5, 6, 10 and 11; Forest bank stations: 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 12; LFR: Lefini Faunal Reserve; LLGNR: the Lesio-Louna Gorilla Natural Reserve.



Figure 2. – Set of gill nets. A: Station 1 (Ah1); B: Station 10 (Avh1).

set (Fig. 2A, B) overnight from 17 h to 7 h (see Ibala Zamba, 2010). All samples were identified in the field, the speci-

mens counted by species, measured to the nearest millimetre standard length, and weighed (fresh total weight) to the nearest 0.01 g. Fishes for which field identification was not certain were preserved in 10% formalin for subsequent identification in the laboratory of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA-Tervuren). The taxonomic order of the families follows that adopted by Eschmeyer *et al.* (2018), while the genera and species follow an alphabetical order.

Measurement of environmental variables

A total of 18 environmental variables (Tab. I) were measured at each sampling station. Sampling protocol followed Ibala Zamba (2010). Data for all 18 parameters were collected at the middle of each of the five nets, after they were set. Therefore, for each station, values given are mean values for 5 gill-nets, 2 days, 2 seasons and 2 years (total n = 40).

The variables included are: current speed (measured using the time taken by a float dropped between two fixed locations spaced 5m apart, and then converted into $m.s^{-1}$); depth (in m, measured with an echo-sounder ECHOTEST II PLASTIMO); pH, water temperature and conductivity (all measured with a WTW pH 330i/SET meter); oxygen (measured in mg/l with an oxymeter WTW Oxi 315i/SET); water transparency (in m, measured with a Secchi disk); distance from river bank (measured in m with a decameter); canopy closure (visually estimated, expressed in %); canopy height (visually estimated, expressed in m); altitude (measured in m with a GPS GARMIN geko 201); distance from the source

(in km, calculated from a scaled map of the Lefini river). The following substrate categories were identified and scored as %: sand, mud (without wood and aquatic plants), dead leaves, aquatic plants, dead wood, mixture of dead wood, dead leaves and mud.

Data analyses

In the present study, a nonsignificant difference ($p > 0.05$) in water depth between dry (0.5-1.8 m; mean = 0.9) and rainy (0.6-2.1 m; mean = 1.1) seasons was reported for all sampling stations. Consequently, season effects were not considered in data analyses. Redundancy Analysis (RDA) (Ter Braak and Šmilauer, 2003) was used to investigate possible correlations between environmental variables and fish community assemblages. Therefore, two matrices covering the 12 sampling stations were constructed: (1) numerical abundance of all species collected and (2) environmental variables. Monte Carlo tests (999 permutations, $p < 0.05$) were used to select environmental variables explaining variation in fish species data. Prior to ordination, fish abundance and environmental data were transformed to better meet the assumptions of normality (Fischer and Paukert, 2008) using respectively $\log_{10}(x + 1)$ and $\ln(x + 1)$ or $\text{ArcSin}\sqrt{x}$ for percentages. In addition, the ecological health of the Lefini River basin was evaluated, calculating three ecological diversity indices (Lande, 1996; Lobry *et al.*, 2003): Species richness S; Shannon index H' with its Shannon maximum index H'_{max} (Shannon, 1948); and Equitability R (Pielou,

Table I. – Physico-chemical characteristics measured. Values in habitat: Minimum-Maximum or mean (Minimum-Maximum). *: Mean values for 5 gill-nets, 2 days, 2 seasons and 2 years (total n = 40)

Environmental variables	Code	Grass bank	Forest bank	t-test	
		n = 6	n = 6	t-value	p
Distance of source (km)	Diss	135.7-238.3	154.3-235.4	-0.116	0.909
Altitude (m)	Alt	303.0-336.0	308.0-328.0	0.216	0.833
Canopy height (m)	Hauc	0	14.0 (10.2-20)	-29.714	< 0.001
Depth (m)*	Pro	1.0 (0.6-1.8)	1.1 (0.7-1.7)	-0.661	0.654
Oxygen (mg/l)*	Oxy	3.7 (2.2-6.2)	4.0 (2.4-5.1)	-0.408	0.691
Conductivity ($\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$)*	Cond	6.8 (6.1-7.3)	7.3 (6.2-9.9)	-0.756	0.466
Transparency (m)*	Tra	1.0 (0.6-1.8)	1.0 (0.7-1.3)	-0.726	0.483
Distance from river bank (m)*	Disb	5.1 (1.1-15)	6.1 (3.2-14)	-0.879	0.399
pH*	pH	5.8 (5.5-6.1)	5.2 (5.1-5.4)	3.817	0.003
Temperature ($^{\circ}\text{C}$)*	T $^{\circ}$	26.9 (25.5-29.8)	25.6 (25.1-26.5)	1.829	0.097
Velocity (m/s)*	Vit	0.2 (0.0-0.3)	(0.1 (0-0.4)	0.356	0.729
Substrate types and canopy closure (in %)					
Canopy closure	Couc	0	46.7 (24.0-67.0)	-11.549	< 0.001
Sand	Sab	47.3 (38.0-76.0)	31.0 (10.0-50.0)	1.894	0.087
Mud	Boue	29.2 (13.0-41.0)	21.8 (12.0-29.0)	1.349	0.206
Dead leaves	Feum	0	17.0 (11.0-30.0)	-11.458	< 0.001
Aquatic plants	Plaa	20.7 (2.0-41.0)	9.5 (4.0-15.0)	1.737	0.113
Dead wood	Boim	0	12.0 (5-23)	-7.903	< 0.001
Mixture of dead wood, dead leaves and mud	Bbf	2.8 (2.0-4.0)	8.7 (6.0-13.0)	-6.227	0.001

Table II. – List of species collected, their code and relative abundance: Values in habitat: mean (Minimum-Maximum).

Family/species	Code	Habitat 1	Habitat 2	Habitat 3	Habitat 4	Habitat 5
Polypteridae						
<i>Polypterus mokelembembe</i> Schliwien & Schäfer, 2006	Polym	0.0	0.5 (0.0-1.5)	0.5 (0.0-1.0)	0.1 (0.1-0.2)	0.0
<i>Polypterus weeksii</i> Boulenger, 1898	Polyw	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
Pantodontidae						
<i>Pantodon buchholzi</i> Peters, 1877	Panb	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.2 (0.1-0.3)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.8 (0.5-1.1)	0.0
Notopteridae						
<i>Papyrocranus congoensis</i> (Nichols & La Monte, 1932)	Papc	0.4 (0-0.7)	0.0	0.0	0.3 (0.1-0.4)	0.0
<i>Xenomystus nigri</i> (Günther, 1868)	Xenon	11.6 (7.9-15.2)	4.9 (3.0-5.8)	3.6 (2.9-4.2)	7.4 (4.0-10.4)	7.1
Mormyridae						
<i>Gnathonemus echiatorhynchus</i> Pellegrin, 1924	Gnae	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.5 (0.4-0.6)	0.3 (0.0-0.8)	0.0
<i>Gnathonemus petersii</i> (Güther, 1862)	Gnap	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.4 (0.0-0.8)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.5 (0.1-1.0)	0.7
<i>Hippopotamyrus weeksii</i> (Boulenger, 1902)	Hipw	0.0	0.4 (0.0-1.1)	1.3 (1.0-1.5)	0.1 (0.0-0.3)	0.5
<i>Marcusenius kuttuensis</i> (Boulenger, 1899)	Mark	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.0
<i>Marcusenius monteiri</i> (Günther, 1873)	Marm	0.0	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0
<i>Marcusenius moorii</i> (Günther, 1867)	Marmc	7.3 (7.0-7.7)	3.4 (1.4-4.5)	1.7 (1.6-1.9)	5.9 (3.6-8.2)	3.7
<i>Mormyrops boulengeri</i> Pellegrin, 1900	Morb	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0
<i>Mormyrops furcatus</i> Pellegrin, 1900	Morf	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Mormyrops nigricans</i> Boulenger, 1899	Morm	0.0	0.2 (0.0-0.6)	0.0	0.2 (0.0-0.4)	0.0
<i>Mormyrops sirenoides</i> Boulenger, 1898	Mors	0.0	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0
<i>Mormyrops zanclostris</i> (Günther, 1867)	Morz	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Mormyrus caballus</i> Boulenger, 1898	Mormb	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.3)	0.3 (0.2-0.3)	0.2 (0.0-0.4)	0.8
<i>Petrocephalus balayi</i> Sauvage, 1883	Petb	2.5 (0.2-4.8)	2.1 (0.9-3.0)	3.9 (2.2-5.6)	0.9 (0.7-1.3)	0.7
<i>Petrocephalus christyi</i> Boulenger, 1920	Petc	0.9 (0.7-1.1)	3.1 (1.7-4.6)	2.1 (1.3-2.9)	2.9 (1.6-4.6)	4.7
<i>Pollimyrus nigripinnis</i> (Boulenger, 1899)	Poln	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.3 (0.0-0.8)	0.2 (0.0-0.4)	0.2 (0.0-0.4)	0.2
<i>Pollimyrus schreyeni</i> Poll, 1972	Pols	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.3 (0.5-0.7)	0.2 (0.0-0.4)	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.7
<i>Stomatorhinus patrizii</i> Vinciguerra, 1928	Stop	0.0	0.2 (0.1-0.2)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0
Clupeidae						
<i>Odaxothrissa losera</i> Boulenger, 1899	Odal	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.1 (0.1-0.2)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0
<i>Pellonula leonensis</i> Boulenger, 1916	Pell	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Pellonula vorax</i> Günther, 1868	Pelv	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.2
Cyprinidae						
<i>Enteromius cf. holotaenia</i> (Boulenger, 1904)	Barh	0.0	1.1 (0.0-2.3)	3.3 (1.5-5.1)	0.7 (0.4-1.5)	0.2
<i>Enteromius validus</i> (Stiasny Liyandja & Monsembula Iyaba, 2016)	Bars	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.4)	0.2 (0.0-0.3)	0.1 (0.0-0.4)	0.0
<i>Raiamas christyi</i> (Boulenger, 1920)	Raic	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.6 (0.0-1.8)	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.3
Hepsetidae						
<i>Hepsetus microlepis</i> (Boulenger, 1901)	Hepm	2.6 (1.2-4.1)	0.9 (0.3-1.5)	0.7 (0.3-0.8)	1.5 (0.6-1.7)	3.1
Alestidae						
<i>Alestes liebrechtsii</i> Boulenger, 1898	Alel	1.8 (0.7-2.9)	2.5 (0.1-4.8)	2.3 (2.1-2.5)	4.0 (0.6-7.3)	1.1
<i>Alestopetersius caudalis</i> (Boulenger, 1899)	Alesc	0.9 (0.7-1.1)	1.5 (0.2-2.8)	0.3 (0.2-0.4)	2.7 (0.4-4.7)	0.2

Table II. – Continued.

Family/species	Code	Habitat 1	Habitat 2	Habitat 3	Habitat 4	Habitat 5
<i>Alestopterus nigropterus</i> Poll, 1967	Altn	1.5 (1.3-1.9)	1.5 (0.2-3.8)	5.5 (3.3-7.6)	5.1 (1.9-8.6)	0.8
<i>Bathyaethiops caudomaculatus</i> (Pellegrin, 1925)	Batc	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0	0.0	0.2
<i>Brachypterus altus</i> (Boulenger, 1899)	Braa	4.4 (3.2-5.5)	9.9 (2.8-18.9)	8.4 (5.4-11.3)	7.8 (1.7-17.4)	6.0
<i>Brycinus grandisquamis</i> (Boulenger, 1899)	Bryg	1.4 (0.2-2.5)	0.8 (0.5-1.5)	1.0 (0.6-1.3)	1.6 (0.5-3.5)	2.3
<i>Brycinus imberi</i> (Peters, 1852)	Bryi	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.3)	0.7 (0.0-1.3)	0.0	0.0
<i>Brycinus poptae</i> (Pellegrin, 1906)	Bryp	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.1)	1.8 (0.0-3.6)	0.7 (0.6-0.8)	0.2
<i>Bryconaeathiops boulengeri</i> Pellegrin, 1900	Brycb	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	1.4 (0.1-2.4)	2.4 (1.7-3.1)	0.4 (0.0-1.0)	1.0
<i>Bryconaeathiops microstoma</i> Günther, 1873	Brycm	0.0	1.5 (0.9-3.2)	3.6 (3.3-3.8)	1.0 (0.0-2.9)	2.8
<i>Hydrocynus forskahlii</i> (Cuvier, 1819)	Hydf	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	1.0
<i>Micralestes acutidens</i> (Peters, 1852)	Mica	0.0	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0
<i>Phenacogrammus interruptus</i> (Boulenger, 1899)	Phei	1.0 (0.2-1.8)	9.0 (1.5-16.1)	13.8 (10.5-17.1)	5.8 (2.1-10.5)	1.0
Citharinidae						
<i>Citharinus macrolepis</i> Boulenger, 1899	Citm	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.2
Distichodontidae						
<i>Distichodus affinis</i> Günther, 1873	Disa	0.0	1.3 (0.3-3.6)	0.3 (0.2-0.4)	0.2 (0.0-0.4)	0.2
<i>Distichodus fasciolatus</i> Boulenger, 1898	Disf	0.0	0.2 (0.0-0.7)	0.0	0.2 (0.0-0.7)	0.0
<i>Distichodus lusosso</i> Schilthuis, 1891	Disl	0.0	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0
<i>Distichodus noboli</i> Boulenger, 1899	Disn	18.2 (10.9-25.5)	7.9 (1.1-19.2)	0.0	1.9 (0.2-4.1)	2.9
<i>Distichodus sexfasciatus</i> Boulenger, 1897	Disx	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Distichodus teugelsi</i> Mamonekene & Vreven, 2008	Dist	0.0	3.1 (0.9-6.1)	1.0 (0.2-1.9)	0.5 (0.1-1.2)	0.2
<i>Eugnathichthys macroterolepis</i> Boulenger, 1899	Eugn	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.3 (0.2-0.5)	0.3 (0.2-0.3)	0.2 (0.1-0.4)	0.5
<i>Mesoborus crocodilus</i> Pellegrin, 1900	Mesc	1.7 (0.5-2.9)	1.2 (0.5-1.5)	1.0 (1.0-1.1)	1.8 (0.5-2.6)	4.5
<i>Nannocharax taenia</i> Boulenger, 1902	Nant	0.0	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.0)	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Phago boulengeri</i> Schilthuis, 1891	Phab	0.9 (0.5-1.4)	0.4 (0.1-0.5)	0.0	0.5 (0.2-0.8)	0.2
<i>Phago intermedius</i> Boulenger, 1899	Phai	0.0	0.2 (0.1-0.3)	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Xenocharax crassus</i> Pellegrin, 1900	Xenc	6.4 (3.4-9.5)	3.0 (0.8-5.9)	4.1 (2.7-5.4)	8.0 (2.4-12.4)	5.3
Claroteidae						
<i>Chrysiichthys ornatus</i> Boulenger, 1902	Chro	1.2 (0.4-1.8)	0.7 (0.4-1.1)	0.4 (0.0-0.9)	0.7 (0.4-1.0)	1.8
<i>Chrysiichthys punctatus</i> Boulenger, 1899	Chrp	4.4 (3.4-5.3)	3.7 (0.4-5.0)	0.6 (0.4-0.9)	2.5 (0.7-4.4)	5.5
<i>Chrysiichthys thomneri</i> Steindachner, 1912	Chrt	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.6 (0.2-0.9)	1.1 (0.3-1.9)	0.5 (0.1-0.7)	1.5
<i>Parauchenoglanis punctatus</i> (Boulenger, 1902)	Parp	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.4 (0.1-0.6)	0.2
Schilbeidae						
<i>Pareutropius debaui</i> (Boulenger, 1900)	Pard	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.06 (0.0-0.2)	3.7 (1.7-5.7)	0.8 (0.7-0.9)	0.7
<i>Schilbe grenfellii</i> (Boulenger, 1900)	Schg	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.9 (0.6-1.6)	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.3
<i>Schilbe marmoratus</i> Boulenger, 1911	Schm	5.8 (4.8-6.7)	13.5 (7.9-17.6)	17.4 (15.1-19.6)	13.5 (12.1-15.0)	9.2
Clariidae						
<i>Channallabes apus</i> (Günther, 1873)	Chaa	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Clarias angolensis</i> Steindachner, 1866	Claa	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.5 (0.2-0.9)	0.2 (0.1-0.3)	0.0

Table II. – Continued.

Family/species	Code	Habitat 1	Habitat 2	Habitat 3	Habitat 4	Habitat 5
Malapteruridae						
<i>Malapterurus microstoma</i> Poll & Gosse, 1969	Malm	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
Mochokidae						
<i>Synodontis contractus</i> Vinciguerra, 1928	Sync	0.0	0.4 (0.0-0.6)	0.8 (0.3-1.3)	0.8 (0.1-1.7)	0.2
<i>Synodontis flavitaeniatus</i> Boulenger, 1919	Synf	0.0	0.3 (0.0-1.1)	0.2 (0.1-0.2)	0.5 (0.1-1.0)	0.2
<i>Synodontis nigriventris</i> David, 1936	Synn	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.4 (0.0-0.9)	0.2 (0.1-0.2)	0.3 (0.1-0.6)	0.2
Mastacembelidae						
<i>Mastacembelus congicus</i> Boulenger, 1896	Masc	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.5 (0.4-0.6)	0.1 (0.0-0.3)	0.2
Cichlidae						
<i>Congolapia bilineata</i> (Pellegrin, 1900)	Comb	4.9 (1.0-8.8)	5.5 (1.8-10.0)	2.3 (1.5-3.1)	2.5 (1.0-4.1)	2.3
<i>Coptodon congica</i> (Poll & Thys van den Audenaerde, 1960)	Copc	2.2 (1.2-3.2)	0.1 (0.0-2.1)	0.0	1.1 (0.4-1.6)	3.1
<i>Hemichromis elongatus</i> (Guichenot, 1861)	Heme	7.2 (5.4-8.9)	1.7 (0.9-3.0)	0.9 (0.8-0.9)	2.0 (1.5-2.6)	4.7
<i>Hemichromis stellifer</i> Loisele, 1979	Hems	1.2 (0.7-1.6)	0.6 (0.0-1.5)	0.2 (0.0-0.2)	0.5 (0.3-0.6)	0.8
<i>Heterochromis multidentis</i> (Pellegrin, 1900)	Hetm	0.0	0.2 (0.0-0.2)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Pelmatochromis nigrofasciatus</i> (Pellegrin, 1900)	Peln	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Tylochromis lateralis</i> (Boulenger, 1898)	Tyll	5.7 (5.0-6.5)	4.1 (1.7-5.6)	1.9 (1.5-2.3)	4.7 (2.6-8.0)	10.3
Anabantidae						
<i>Ctenopoma acutirostre</i> Pellegrin, 1899	Ctea	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.5 (0.3-0.9)	0.3 (0.2-0.4)	0.2 (0.1-0.3)	0.2
<i>Ctenopoma kingsleyae</i> Günther, 1896	Ctek	0.0	0.2 (0.0-0.8)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Ctenopoma nigropannosum</i> Reichenow, 1875	Cten	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.1 (0.0-0.1)	0.1 (0.1-0.2)	0.2
<i>Ctenopoma ocellatum</i> Pellegrin, 1899	Cteo	0.4 (0.0-0.7)	0.2 (0.0-0.5)	0.1 (0.0-0.2)	0.2 (0.0-0.3)	0.0
<i>Ctenopoma weeksii</i> Boulenger, 1896	Ctew	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
<i>Microctenopoma nanum</i> (Günther, 1896)	Micn	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.1)	0.0
Channidae						
<i>Parachanna insignis</i> (Sauvage, 1884)	Pari	0.2 (0.0-0.3)	0.2 (0.0-0.2)	0.0	0.1 (0.0-0.3)	0.0
Tetraodontidae						
<i>Tetraodon miurus</i> Boulenger, 1902	Tetm	0.0	0.0 (0.0-0.1)	0.0	0.0	0.0

and habitat (5) forest with low canopy coverage 24.0% (Pf2). Based on the RDA analysis (Fig. 3B), it is clear that some species can be considered as characteristic for certain habitats.

The main fish species found in Habitat (1), positively correlated with axe 1, are *Distichodus noboli*, *Mormyrops zanclirostris*, *Chrysichthys punctatus*, *Pelmatochromis nigrofasciatus* and *Phago boulengeri*. Habitat 2, negatively correlated with axe 2, is mainly characterised by *Stomatorhinus patrizii*, *Phago intermedius*, *Distichodus affinis*, *D. teugelsi*, *Ctenopoma acutirostre*, *Heterochromis multidentis* and *Tetraodon miurus*. Habitat 3, negatively correlated with axe 1, included *Schilbe marmoratus*, *Phenacogrammus interruptus*, *Hippopotamyrus weeksii*, *Gnathonemus echiidnorhynchus*, *Clarias angolensis*, *Bryconaeithiops microstoma*, *Marcuseinius monteiri*, *Micralestes acutidens* and *Distichodus lusosso*. Habitat 4, positively correlated with axe 2, included *Mormyrus caballus*, *Brycinus grandisquamis*, *B. poptae*, *Alestopetersius nigropterus*, *Schilbe grenfelli*, *Microctenopoma nanum*, *Mastacembelus congicus*, *Parauchenoglanis punctatus*, *Ctenopoma weeksii*, *Mormyrops furcidens*, *Channallabes apus* and *Pantodon bucholzi*. Finally, habitat 5 correlated positively with axe 2, is mainly characterised by *Citharinus macrolepis*, *Malapterurus microstoma*, *Hepsetus microlepis*, *Pellonula vorax*, *Hydrocinus forskahlii* and *Xenomystus nigri*.

Spatial variation of ecological diversity indices

For each of the five habitats provided by the RDA, the species richness S, Shannon index

Table III. – Ecological diversity indices. Values in habitat: mean (Minimum-Maximum). N: number of specimens; S: Species richness; H': Shannon index; H'max.: Shannon maximum index; R: Equitability.

Habitats	N	S	R	H'	H'max.
Habitat 1	427 (415-439)	35 (32-38)	0.79 (0.73-0.86)	2.82 (2.64-3)	3.56 (3.47-3.64)
Habitat 2	672 (473-849)	50 (45-55)	0.78 (0.76-0.79)	3.04 (2.93-3.15)	3.91 (3.81-4.01)
Habitat 3	567 (469-665)	47 (44-50)	0.79 (0.78-0.79)	3.02 (2.98-3.06)	3.85 (3.78-3.91)
Habitat 4	1146 (863-1441)	56 (52-58)	0.77 (0.75-0.79)	3.09 (3.01-3.21)	4.02 (3.95-4.6)
Habitat 5	583	51	0.82	3.24	3.93

H', Shannon maximum index H'max. and Equitability R were calculated. For habitats 1, 2, 3 and 4, these values are represented by the mean of its values obtained in the stations, which constitute the habitat. In habitat 5, consisting of a single station Pf2, values were reported as such (Tab. III). With averages of 427 specimens (415-439) and 35 species (32-38), habitat 1 was the least diversified, whereas habitat 4 was most diversified with 1146 specimens (863-1441) and 56 species (52-58). However, mean values of Equitability were highest in habitats 1 and 3 respectively 0.79 (0.73-0.86) and 0.79 (0.78-0.79) and low 0.77 (0.75-0.79) in habitat 4.

DISCUSSION

The fish diversity study of the Lefini River basin provided by Ibalá Zamba (2010) reported 140 species belonging to 76 genera, 27 families. In that study, 110 stations were sampled using a variety of collecting methods to sample as much of the available habitat diversity as possible. The present study investigates the spatial distribution of fish communities in relation to environmental variables; 84 species are reported from 12 stations sampled following standardized methods utilizing monofilament gill nets.

Unlike the standard observation of species richness increasing downstream (Hugueny, 1989, 1990; Paugy and Bénech, 1989; Pouilly, 1993; Hay *et al.*, 1996; Kamdem Toham and Teugels, 1997, 1998; Kouamé *et al.* 2008), or the opposing observation in some cases (Kouadio *et al.*, 2006), richness did not change in an upstream-downstream gradient in the Lefini River basin, in the 103 km section studied. This result corroborates that of Mérona (1981) in the Bandama in Ivory Coast, and could be explained by the low human impacts along the Lefini River and also certainly by the low slope (33 m) between the most distant stations; from upstream to downstream Ah1 situated about 135 km from the source and Avh1.

According to Chapman and Chapman (2003), forest rivers are often characterized by ion-poor waters, acidity (pH < 7) and low conductivity. Waters of the Lefini River basin, bordered by an important gallery forest, are in general acidic ($5.1 \leq \text{pH} \leq 6.1$) with a low conductivity (5.9-9.9 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$). However, significant differences ($p = 0.003$) were found

between forest and grass bank type stations with respectively low (5.1-5.4) and high pH (5.5-6.1) (Tab. I). The presence of organic matter (dead leaves, dead wood and mixture of dead wood, dead leaves and mud) in forest bank type stations is likely responsible for these significant differences in pH.

According to the RDA (Fig. 3A), temperature (16.5%) is the most important variable for fish distribution in the Lefini River. This variable is strongly correlated with habitat 1, pool with fringing grasses, where the average temperature is 29.3°C, significantly different from the other four habitats ($p < 0.001$). These high temperatures and low oxygen levels (mean = 2.5 mg/l), which are also significantly different from the other four habitats ($p = 0.03$), probably contribute to the fact that low fish diversity of habitat 1 (mean S = 35 vs. 47-56). Species with the most important relative abundance values in this habitat are *Distichodus noboli*, *Xenomystus nigri*, *Marcusenius moorii* and *Hemichromis elongatus* (see Tab II). In some West Africa rivers, several authors have mentioned the importance of temperature on fish distribution (Kouamélan *et al.*, 2003; Yao *et al.*, 2005; Kouadio *et al.*, 2006; Aboua *et al.*, 2015). In addition, according to Lowe-McConnell (1987), still waters are characterized by high temperatures.

The canopy closure (9.8%) and canopy height (9.5%), characteristic for forest habitats type (habitat 3, 4 and 5), are the two other most important variables for fish distribution in the Lefini River. Several authors have noted the importance of the canopy closure or height on fish distribution (Kamdem Toham and Teugels, 1997, 1998; Kouamélan *et al.*, 2003; Yao *et al.*, 2005; Kouadio *et al.*, 2006; Esteves *et al.*, 2008; Kouamé *et al.*, 2008). The structure, as well as the functional importance of overhanging vegetation in determining the temperature, physical chemistry, hydraulic regime, and the distributions of organisms in aquatic environments have been well-documented by Lowe-McConnell (1975) and Brosset (1982) for African aquatic ecosystems.

According to Barbault (1992) and Korkmaz and Zencir (2009), studying fish communities using diversity indices does not reflect the organisational modalities of populations in a system. However, these indices are of great importance for the diagnosis of the ecological health of an aquatic ecosystem (Lobry *et al.*, 2003). In the present study, the three ecological diversity indices (S, H' and R), calculated based on species abundance revealed that in all habitats, the H' and R indices are approaching their maximum values, respectively H' maximum for H' and 1 for R (Tab. III), even in the least diverse habitat 1. This reflects an excellent distribution of species abundance in the Lefini river basin. Indeed, according to Ludwig and Reynolds (1988) and Lobry *et al.*

(2003), when all species of the community are an excellent distribution of abundance and the environmental in good ecological health, H' and R indices calculated are approaching their maximum values.

CONCLUSION

Our results contribute to a better understanding of fish distribution in the Lefini River basin. Specifically, the study indicates that in the Lefini River basin, fish populations are distributed according five habitat types: pool with fringing grasses, banks grass fringed, forest with high canopy coverage, forest with mean canopy coverage and forest with low canopy coverage. The index of species richness showed that grassy habitats are the least diversified. In addition, the high value of Shannon and Equitability indices in all habitats indicates that the examined stretch of the Lefini basin is in good ecological health.

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Appendix I. – Sampling stations (1-12), their location, coordinates and date of the sampling periods. Forest bank stations in grey.

Station	Description	Code	Coordinates	Date of the sampling periods			
				Dry season		Rainy season	
				2007	2008	2007	2008
1	Lefini River, confluent Lefini-Nambouli, left bank	Ah1	2°53,764'S-15°06,846'E	28-29/08	5-6/08	22-23/04	24-25/03
2	Lefini River at 2.4 km downstream of camp Malina, right bank	Af1	2°59,231'S-15°11,755'E	25-26/08	1-2/08	25-26/04	20-21/03
3	Lefini River, ± 3 km upstream of confluent Lefini-Loubilika, right bank	Af2	3°01,155'S-15°14,239'E	23-24/08	30-31/07	27-28/04	18-19/03
4	Lefini River, ± 4 km down- stream of camp Malina, right bank	Ah2	2°59,447'S-15°11,988'E	18-19/08	3-4/08	14-15/04	22-23/03
5	Lefini River, ± 3 km upstream of mount Epopé, left bank	Ph1	3°01,971'S-15°23,707'E	7-8/08	26-27/07	30/04-1/05	28-29/03
6	Lefini River at 600 m upstream of camp Oteni, left bank	Ph2	3°00,625'S-15°27,359'E	9-10/08	28-29/07	28-29/03	30-31/03
7	Lefini River, downstream of mount Epopé, right bank	Pf1	3°00,484'S-15°28,869'E	11-12/08	22-23/07	25-26/03	1-2/04
8	Lefini River, in front of Lesio-Louna Gorilla Natural Reserve	Pf2	2°59,649'S-15°29,751'E	13-14/08	24-25/07	22-23/03	26-27/03
9	Lefini River, at Mondo camp, left bank	Avf1	2°55,789'S-15°34,570'E	15-16/08	7-8/08	19-20/03	13-14/04
10	Lefini River upstream of Obanga camp, right bank	Avh1	2°49,084'S-15°48,770'E	20-21/08	13-14/08	17-18/03	19-20/04
11	Lefini River, ± 3 km upstream of Oteni camp, left bank	Avh2	2°49,480'S-15°47,507'E	18-19/08	11-12/08	14-15/03	17-18/04
12	Lefini River, second channel, ± 500 m upstream of camp Oteni, left bank. Lesio-Louna Gorilla Natural Reserve	Avf2	2°50,251'S-15°46,787'E	22-23/08	9-10/08	11-12/03	14-15/04

Appendix II. – List of species collected with their abundance in sampling stations.

Family/species	Stations											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Polypteridae												
<i>Polypterus mokelembembe</i>	1	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	5	0	9	1
<i>Polypterus weeksii</i>	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Pantodontidae												
<i>Pantodon buchholzi</i>	1	10	0	2	1	1	13	0	1	0	2	4
Notopteridae												
<i>Papyrocranus congoensis</i>	0	3	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	3	0	1
<i>Xenomystus nigri</i>	50	156	14	35	26	24	91	44	29	63	33	35
Mormyridae												
<i>Gnathonemus echiidnorhynchus</i>	1	0	2	0	0	0	9	0	4	0	0	0
<i>Gnathonemus petersii</i>	7	3	0	1	2	2	12	4	1	0	0	1
<i>Hippopotamyrus weeksii</i>	0	0	5	0	5	3	1	3	10	0	1	3
<i>Marcusenius kutuensis</i>	1	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	1	0	0	0
<i>Marcusenius monteiri</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
<i>Marcusenius moorii</i>	36	124	9	34	7	28	67	23	11	29	27	32
<i>Mormyrops boulengeri</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
<i>Mormyrops furcidens</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Mormyrops nigricans</i>	1	2	0	0	3	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Mormyrops sirenoides</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Mormyrops zanclirostris</i>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Appendix II. – Continued.

Family/species	Stations											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>Mormyrus caballus</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	5	2	0	2	2
<i>Petrocephalus balayi</i>	23	19	27	21	4	24	10	4	15	1	11	5
<i>Petrocephalus christyi</i>	40	35	14	5	8	25	19	29	9	3	17	41
<i>Pollimyrus nigripinnis</i>	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	1	3	1	5	1
<i>Pollimyrus schreyeni</i>	0	0	0	1	0	4	1	4	3	0	4	4
<i>Stomatorhinus patrizii</i>	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Clupeidae												
<i>Odaxothrissa losera</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	2
<i>Pellonula leonensis</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Pellonula vorax</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Cyprinidae												
<i>Enteromius cf. holotaenia</i>	24	22	7	0	0	9	5	1	35	0	2	1
<i>Enteromius validus</i>	1	0	0	0	2	0	5	0	2	0	0	0
<i>Raiamas christyi</i>	3	3	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	11	0
Hepsetidae												
<i>Hepsetus microlepis</i>	13	31	4	18	4	2	20	19	2	5	5	5
Alestidae												
<i>Alestes liebrechtsii</i>	1	9	10	3	6	29	46	7	17	12	29	65
<i>Alestopetersius caudalis</i>	24	43	2	5	1	20	5	1	1	3	2	42
<i>Alestopetersius nigropterus</i>	33	129	16	5	4	8	56	5	52	8	1	17
<i>Bathyaethiops caudomaculatus</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
<i>Brachypetersius altus</i>	24	25	26	14	21	150	50	37	78	23	81	154
<i>Brycinus grandisquamis</i>	5	7	3	11	3	4	11	14	9	1	9	31
<i>Brycinus imberi</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	2	0
<i>Brycinus poptae</i>	1	12	17	0	0	1	7	1	0	0	0	6
<i>Bryconaethiops boulengeri</i>	19	4	15	0	4	19	11	6	12	1	1	0
<i>Bryconaethiops microstoma</i>	28	0	18	0	4	14	33	17	23	0	1	1
<i>Hydrocynus forskahlii</i>	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	1
<i>Micralestes acutidens</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Phenacogrammus interruptus</i>	139	71	82	8	49	64	121	6	72	1	9	19
Citharinidae												
<i>Citharinus macrolepis</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Distichodontidae												
<i>Distichodus affinis</i>	6	0	2	0	17	2	5	1	1	0	4	1
<i>Distichodus fasciolatus</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	6
<i>Distichodus lusosso</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Distichodus noboli</i>	68	62	0	48	91	9	15	18	0	106	20	2
<i>Distichodus sexfasciatus</i>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Distichodus teugelsi</i>	2	18	9	0	29	7	1	1	1	0	30	2
<i>Eugnathichthys macroterolepis</i>	2	1	1	0	2	4	4	3	2	1	1	2
<i>Mesoborus crocodilus</i>	13	37	5	13	7	9	30	28	7	2	3	4
<i>Nannocharax taenia</i>	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Phago boulengeri</i>	1	9	0	6	2	4	9	1	0	2	3	2
<i>Phago intermedius</i>	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
<i>Xenocharax crassus</i>	28	187	13	42	10	47	105	33	37	14	5	21
Claroteidae												
<i>Chrysichthys ornatus</i>	9	8	0	8	2	5	5	11	6	2	4	9
<i>Chrysichthys punctatus</i>	36	11	2	15	2	28	14	34	6	22	30	48
<i>Chrysichthys thonneri</i>	4	2	9	1	1	7	8	9	2	0	4	6

Appendix II. – Continued.

Family/species	Stations											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>Parauchenoglanis punctatus</i>	1	2	0	0	1	0	7	1	0	0	1	3
Schilbeidae												
<i>Pareutropius debauwi</i>	2	14	8	0	0	17	9	4	39	2	1	6
<i>Schilbe grenfelli</i>	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	8	1	1	4
<i>Schilbe marmoratus</i>	68	203	94	30	70	140	173	57	104	20	83	107
Clariidae												
<i>Channallabes apus</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Clarias angolensis</i>	1	5	1	0	0	1	3	0	6	1	1	1
Malapteruridae												
<i>Malapterurus microstoma</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Mochokidae												
<i>Synodontis contractus</i>	5	7	6	0	2	5	1	1	2	0	0	15
<i>Synodontis flavitaeniatus</i>	1	4	1	0	5	1	12	1	1	0	0	1
<i>Synodontis nigriventris</i>	3	9	1	0	4	0	2	1	1	2	3	1
Mastacembelidae												
<i>Mastacembelus congicus</i>	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	1	3	0	1	3
Cichlidae												
<i>Congolapia bilineata</i>	44	36	15	39	24	14	12	14	10	4	60	36
<i>Coptodon congica</i>	5	6	0	14	10	0	19	19	0	5	0	10
<i>Hemichromis elongatus</i>	12	31	4	24	14	7	30	29	6	37	6	13
<i>Hemichromis stellifer</i>	5	9	0	7	7	0	7	5	2	3	2	3
<i>Heterochromis multidens</i>	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
<i>Pelmatochromis nigrofasciatus</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
<i>Tylochromis lateralis</i>	44	52	11	22	8	30	30	64	10	27	34	71
Anabantidae												
<i>Ctenopoma acutirostre</i>	3	5	2	2	4	2	1	1	1	0	4	1
<i>Ctenopoma kingsleyae</i>	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
<i>Ctenopoma nigropannosum</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
<i>Ctenopoma ocellatum</i>	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	3	3	3
<i>Ctenopoma weeksii</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Microctenopoma nanum</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Channidae												
<i>Parachanna insignis</i>)	2	2	0	1	1	0	3	0	0	1	1	0
Tetraodontidae												
<i>Tetraodon miurus</i>	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

