

First record of the eel *Anguilla bengalensis* from Arabia with notes on freshwater fishes from Hadhramout, Yemen

by Ali Mukhaysin Attaala and Bazar Salem Rubaia

Abstract. The relatively rich freshwater fauna of Wadi Hajr in southeastern Yemen is studied, and details on the diagnostic characteristics of two newly recorded eel species, *Anguilla bengalensis* and *A. bicolor*, are given. *A. bengalensis* is the first record for the Arabian Peninsula; specimens collected apparently belong to the subspecies *labiata*. Information is also given on four other freshwater fishes new to Yemen or to Wadi Hajr: *Garra tibanica*, *Barbus exulatus*, and *Awaous aeneofuscus* as autochthonous occurrences, and *Oreochromis mossambicus* as an introduced species.

Kurzfassung. In dieser Arbeit wird die relativ reiche Süßwasserfauna von Wadi Hajr im südöstlichen Jemen untersucht. Die beiden Aale *Anguilla bengalensis* und *A. bicolor* sind Neunachweise, wobei es sich bei *A. bengalensis* um den Erstdnachweis für die Arabische Halbinsel handelt. Die gesammelten Individuen gehören offenbar der Subspezies *labiata* an. Weiter wurden vier Arten nachgewiesen, die für Jemen bzw. Wadi Hajr neu sind: *Garra tibanica*, *Barbus exulatus* und *Awaous aeneofuscus* als autochthone Arten, und *Oreochromis mossambicus* als eingeführte Art.

Key words. Indian Ocean, Wadi Hajr, freshwater fishes, *Anguilla bicolor*, freshwater eels, morphology.

Introduction

In contrast to the flourishing marine fauna around Yemen, very little is known about the country's freshwater fishes which have been neglected for a long time, possibly due to their typically small size and non-commercial value. Except for a few publications that deal mainly with cyprinids, we find very little information on other groups such as cichlids or anguillids (BALLETO & SPANO 1977, BANISTER & CLARKE 1977, ALKAHIM & BEHNKE 1983, KRUPP 1983, AL-SAFADI 1992, 1998). There are a few scattered notes dealing with Gobies and Mugillids, but no serious descriptive work (TREWAVAS 1941, BROWN 1970, FEULNER 1998).

Although freshwater eels are typically large, they often shelter between rocks and in crevices or even in burrows in the muddy bottoms of streams during the daytime, prowling and hunting at night. This makes them difficult to find and to catch in larger numbers. So far, freshwater long-fin eels (Anguillidae) have not been recorded in Arabia, in spite of being recorded in most parts of the Indian Ocean coasts including Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and the majority of southeast African streams including Somalia (JUBB 1961, BRUTON et al. 1987, TALWAR & JHINGRAN 1992, ARAI et al. 1999). In April 2000, during a scientific expedition to Wadi Hajr, a stream located about 70 km southwest of Mukalla, we collected a few specimens of an eel. We described them provisionally as *Anguilla* spp. within a collection of freshwater fishes of Wadi Hajr, Governorate of Hadhramout (ALI 2001). To confirm the