

Gobiid fishes of the genera *Chasar*, *Mesogobius* and *Neogobius* (Teleostei: Gobiidae) from Iran (South Caspian Basin)

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Abstract. The neogobiine fishes *Chasar bathybius*, *Mesogobius nonultimus*, *Neogobius caspius* and *Neogobius syrman* are reported from the Caspian Basin of Iran. These four gobiid species are rarely found in the southern part of the Caspian Sea. In this study the first documented records of these species are presented for Iran.

Kurzfassung. *Chasar bathybius*, *Mesogobius nonultimus*, *Neogobius caspius* und *Neogobius syrman*, vier großwüchsige Arten der neogobiinen Meergrundeln, werden für das südliche Kaspische Meer im Iran nachgewiesen. Diese vier Gobiidenarten sind im Kaspischen Meer vermutlich weit verbreitet, werden aber im südlichen Teil selten gefunden. Mit den vorliegenden Nachweisen werden diese Meergrundelarten erstmals für den Iran dokumentiert.

Key words. Gobiidae, neogobiines, rare species, new records, Caspian Sea, Iran.

Introduction

The neogobiines are a diverse group of the Gobiidae endemic to the Ponto-Caspian region. This lineage is formed by four genera, *Chasar* Vasil'eva, 1996, *Mesogobius* Bleeker, 1874, *Neogobius* Iljin, 1927 and *Proterorhinus* Smitt, 1899, and comprises about 18 species (MILLER 2003, 2004). By far the most diverse group within the neogobiines is the paraphyletic species group *Neogobius* (see below) (MILLER & VASIL'EVA in MILLER 2003, BOGUTSKAYA & NASEKA 2004). The taxonomy of *Neogobius* is variable, unstable and frequently uncertain since differences between Black Sea and Caspian Sea populations are usually small and since there are migrating and resident marine and freshwater populations of the same species (AHNELT & HOLČÍK 1996). Many species are characterised by a high variability of morphological features (PINCHUK 1977, VASIL'EVA et al. 1993a, 1993b, VASIL'EVA & VASIL'EV 1994) and by the ability to adapt to varying habitats (PINCHUK 1977, 1991, AHNELT & HOLČÍK 1996). This resulted in long synonymy lists and in the recognition of several subgenera and subspecies (BERG 1949). The intraspecific variability and high adaptability to different environmental conditions seemingly is influenced by various geological events, especially the formation of the Paratethys during the Tertiary and the Ice Ages in the Quaternary. For instance the west Caucasian and Caspian riverine gobies are very similar morphologically because of recent differentiation about 11,000-9,000 years BP after the isolation of the Black and Caspian seas (PINCHUK 1977, 1991, VASIL'EVA & VASIL'EV 1994, VASIL'EVA 1994).

There is an enormous amount of literature dealing with the gobiid fish fauna from the Caspian Sea catchment area of Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan but much less information is provided from Iranian waters (summarised in KIABI et al. 1999, MILLER 2003, 2004). The occurrence and distribution of gobiid fishes in the South Caspian Basin of Iran is