

FISHBASE: AN INFORMATION SYSTEM AND RESEARCH TOOL

Musschoot Tobias, Gert Boden and Jos Snoeks

Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika, Department of Zoology, Ichthyology
Leuvensesteenweg 13, B-3080 Tervuren, Belgium
E-mail: Tobias.Musschoot@africamuseum.be

FishBase was developed at the WorldFish Center (former ICLARM) from 1987 onwards, with support from the European Commission between 1989 and 2000. Since 2001 FishBase is supported by a consortium, including the WorldFish Center (Malaysia), FAO (Italy), the Africa Museum (Belgium), the Natural History Museums of Paris (France) and Stockholm (Sweden), and the Universities of Kiel (Germany), British Columbia (Canada) and Thessaloniki (Greece). The Africa Museum is responsible for the validation and updating of the information of all African fresh- and brackish water fishes.

Although originally intended to accommodate information about the most important fishery and aquaculture fish species, and to facilitate the transfer of this information to the developing countries, FishBase has evolved into the largest fish database in the world. Since its launch on the internet, FishBase usage steadily grew from about 100,000 hits per month in 1999 to over 23 million in January 2006. Next to the monthly internet updates, CD and DVD versions of FishBase are produced on a regular basis.

The FishBase portal (www.fishbase.org) allows to search for data of the more than 29,000 fish species known to date. All information, available in different languages and scripts, is based on scientific publications and data provided by experts. This includes taxonomic position, distribution, morphology, ecology, reproduction, population dynamics, etc. FishBase not only serves as an information depository, but also contains tools for fish identification, biogeographical modelling, construction and analysis of trophic pyramids, and for the analysis of fishery and aquaculture statistics.

In the light of dwindling fish-stocks worldwide, and based on information in FishBase, the University of Kiel generated Fish Rulers for the North Sea and Baltic Sea (www.incofish.org). These indicate the size at which 90-100% of the individuals of a species are mature, allowing them to reproduce and contribute to the growth of fish stocks before being caught. By stimulating fishermen and consumers not to catch or buy fish smaller than the size indicated on the ruler, an attempt is made to protect stocks from overfishing and allowing them to recover. In addition, a fact sheet was produced containing information on the spawning seasons and maturity weights and lengths for several Northern European fish-stocks. This can help fish traders to order fish from stocks which are not currently spawning, and in weight classes large enough to ensure adulthood.