

Twelve years of FishBase: lessons learned

G. Boden and G.G. Teugels

Africa Museum, Ichthyology
Leuvensesteenweg 13, B-3080 Tervuren, Belgium

E-mail: boden@africamuseum.be

In 1990, the European Commission supported the initiative to put up a database on fishes called FishBase. This database was seen as a transfer of information and knowledge to the developing countries. The FishBase-concept was developed at ICLARM by Rainer Froese and Daniel Pauly, together with many other partners and institutions such as FAO. In 2000, a FishBase Consortium was funded in order to maintain the database permanently. This FishBase Consortium consists of seven members, which are all complementary in their specialisation: FAO, ICLARM, IfM, MNHN, MRAC, NRM and UBC-FC. A CD-ROM version of FishBase was released every year since 1996, and since 1999 FishBase is also available on the Internet. The number of hits increased from 500,000 in December 1999 to over 4,000,000 in August 2002. Visitors are mostly originating from North America, Europe and Asia. Availability of Internet-connections is much higher in these parts of the world than in, e.g. Africa. Individuals form the greatest part of FishBase-users, followed by universities, the private sector and governments. The common names of fishes are used heavily as well as the species summaries and the photos. Compared with this, specialist topics and scientific names are less frequently used. Therefore we can conclude that FishBase is well used by non-professional people looking for correct information on fishes. But FishBase citations in scientific journals prove also the usage of FishBase by scientific researchers. The information offered by FishBase is originating from scientific publications, which are a reliable source for correct information. However interaction with FishBase-users is not neglected. Critical comments and questions of people are followed up by FishBase Team members, and they will make corrections if necessary. The important factors for FishBase are data quality and quantity. Different databases are incorporated in FishBase like Eschmeyer's Catalog of Fishes, FAO Databases, IUCN's Red List, National Fish Databases and others. More than 600 webpages are now linked to FishBase. New useful topics like e.g. identification keys, distribution maps and common names in language scripts other than Latin, will further increase the FishBase usage on the internet.