

FISHBASE: THE ON-LINE ANSWER TO ICHTHYOLOGICAL ISSUES

Boden Gert, Tobias Musschoot and Jos Snoeks

Royal Museum for Central Africa, Department of Zoology, Ichthyology
Leuvensesteenweg 13, B-3080 Tervuren, Belgium
E-mail: gert.boden@africamuseum.be

FishBase was initiated by Daniel Pauly and Rainer Froese as an electronic fact sheets database for the economically most important fish species. From 1987 onwards FishBase was developed at the WorldFish Center (former ICLARM), and subsequently financed by the European Commission between 1989 and 2000. Since 2001, FishBase is supported by a consortium, including the WorldFish Center (Malaysia), FAO (Italy), The Royal Museum for Central Africa (Belgium), the Natural History Museums of Paris (France) and Stockholm (Sweden), the Universities of Kiel (Germany), British Columbia (Canada) and Thessaloniki (Greece), and the Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences (China). At present FishBase is the largest on-line encyclopaedia on fishes, with about 20 – 25 million hits per month.

Information on more than 30,000 fish species is available through the FishBase portal (www.fishbase.org) or one of its 6 mirror-sites, including data on the taxonomic position, distribution, morphology and ecology, as well as numerous aspects of aquaculture and fisheries biology. Information is based on scientific publications or provided by experts. Many deep links are provided to other relevant websites such as those of the IUCN (conservation) and GenBank (genetics). The Royal Museum for Central Africa is responsible for the validation and updating of the information on all African fresh- and brackish water fishes and developed in 2007 a portal for the African inland fishes (www.fishbaseforafrica.org).

FishBase contains a lot of applications for fish and fisheries scientists, such as tools for fish identification, biogeographical modelling, construction and analysis of trophic pyramids, analysis of fishery and aquaculture statistics, diagnosis of fish diseases, etc. Some of these have already proved their importance to support concepts like 'fishing down food webs' (Pauly *et al.*, 1998).

References

Pauly D., V. Christensen, J. Dalsgaard, R. Froese and F. Torres, Jr. 1998. Fishing down marine food webs. *Science* 279(5352):860-863.