

***Schistura oresbios*, a new species of loach from the Nam Ngum drainage, central Laos (Teleostei: Nemacheilidae)**

Maurice Kottelat*

Schistura oresbios, new species, is described from small streams and headwaters in the middle Nam Ngum watershed, Mekong drainage, central Laos. It is distinguished from all other species of *Schistura* in Southeast Asia by the presence of elongate conical projections on lips and barbels of large males (above about 75 mm SL); the lower lip has a median interruption; on each side of the interruption, the extremity of the lower lip is not adnate to the lower jaw, and forms a flap folded under the superficial part and along the anterior edge of the lower jaw; 8½ branched dorsal-fin rays; 9–14 bars on body; bars below dorsal fin and behind narrower than interspaces, slightly slanted downwards-backwards; bars anterior to dorsal fin usually as wide or wider than interspaces, sometimes not reaching to dorsal midline and appearing as vertically elongated blotches (well distinct only in juveniles and females). A list of the 57 species recorded in the middle and upper Nam Ngum is given in an appendix.

Introduction

Loaches of the genus *Schistura* typically occur in fast-flowing waters of small streams as well as in other habitats, such as large rivers and caves. The genus presently includes about 240 valid species (pers. obs., updated from Kottelat, 2012, 2013). The genus has its greatest diversity in Southeast Asia (Irrawaddy, Salween, Mae Khlong, Chao Phraya, Mekong and Red River drainages, and drainages in between) from where about 160 species have been described; most are described and figured in Kottelat (1990, 1998, 2000, 2001) and Freyhof & Serov (2001). New species of *Schistura* and closely related genera are still regularly described (e.g. Bohlen & Šlechtová, 2010, 2013a–b; Conway &

Kottelat, 2023; Dvořák et al., 2023; Ou et al., 2011; Plongsesthee et al., 2013; Bohlen et al., 2014, 2016; Kottelat, 2017a–g, 2019, 2023; Kottelat et al., 2024). The interrelationships within *Schistura* have not been studied in detail but accumulating morphological, molecular and distribution data unsurprisingly show that the genus is not monophyletic (pers. obs.; see also, e.g., Freyhof et al., 2016; Dvořák et al., 2022; Šlechtová et al., 2025). Awaiting the results of a generic revision in progress, they are all retained under the name *Schistura*.

The Nam Ngum is a river in central Laos and a tributary of the Mekong, which it enters downriver of Vientiane. In the Mekong floodplain a dam created the Nam Ngum 1 reservoir in 1971; since

* Rue des Rauragues 6, 2800 Delémont, Switzerland (permanent address); and Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, National University of Singapore, 2 Conservatory Drive, Singapore 117377.
E-mail: mkottelat@dplanet.ch



Fig. 17. *Schistura quasimodo*, CMK 23805, 43.3 mm SL; Laos: Nam Ngum watershed.

distance from pelvic-fin base and anal-fin origin; body usually with 6–8 broad dark bars (up to 10 bars in juveniles less than about 20 mm SL); body sometimes plain dark brown, independently of size; lateral line reaching at most to anal-fin origin; no median notch in upper lip.

Material used for comparison. Most morphometric data are from Kottelat (1990, 1998, 2000). In addition, the following material was available for comparison of non-morphometric characters (only species of similar appearance or from adjacent watersheds in Mekong drainage are listed): *Rhyacochistura suber*: CMK 22555, 9; *Schistura albisella*: CMK 24358, 32, paratypes; *S. buculenta*: CMK 27969, 12; *S. coruscans*: CMK 24291, 21; CMK 23149, 143; *S. crabro*: CMK 24534, 2; CMK 24559, 2; *S. crassa*: CMK 24329, 4, paratypes; *S. defectiva*: CMK 23684, 7; *S. ephelis*: CMK 13356, 32, paratypes; *S. epixenos*: CMK 17135, 6, paratypes; *S. klydonion*, CMK 23320, 25, paratypes; *S. kongphengi*: CMK 12771, 31, paratypes; CMK 16034, 102; CMK 19107, 12; *S. leukensis*: CMK 13315, 90, paratypes; *S. nicholsi*: CMK 5029, 15; CMK 15039, 41; CMK 24680, 134; *S. palma*: CMK 24294, 109, paratypes; *S. personata*: CMK 13354, 12, paratypes; CMK 22705, 30; *S. porthos*: CMK 14096, 20; CMK 14282, 132, paratypes; *S. procera*: CMK 14191, 26, paratypes; *S. quaesita*: CMK 22699, 42; CMK 22706, 14; CMK 22749, 40; *S. quasimodo*: CMK 13352, 37, paratypes; CMK 23578, 1; CMK 23805, 2; *S. sombooni*: CMK 12684, 72 paratypes; CMK 15241, 27; *S. tenura*: CMK 13324, 25, paratypes; CMK 13329, 22.

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