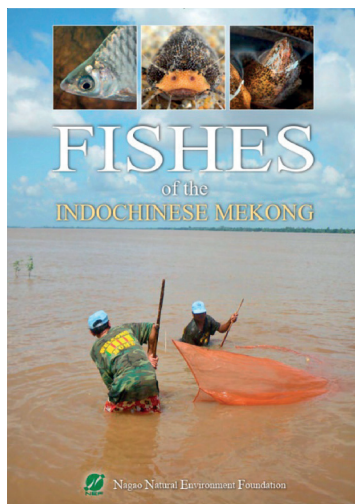


Fishes of the Indochinese Mekong by Yasuhiko Taki, Ryutaro Ohtsuka, Makoto Komoda, Yoshihiro Natori, Kenzo Utsugi, Koichi Shibukawa, Tomoko Oizumi, Stefan, Ottomanski, Bounthob Praxaysombath, Koneouma Phongsa, Wichian Magtoon, Prachya Musikasinthorn, Chaiwut Grudpan, Jarungjit Grudpan, Apinun Suvarnaraksha, Nam So, Phanara Thach, Phuong Thanh Nguyen, Dinh Dac Tran and Loi Xuan Tran (eds.). 2021. Nagao Natural Environment Foundation (NEF), Tokyo. xii + 546 pp. (A printed version is available from the editors and NEF. An e-book version can be read at http://www.nagaofoundation.or.jp/e/publication/e-book/mekongfishes/book/index.html#target/page_no=1)



Fishes of the Indochinese Mekong is a detailed guide to the fishes found in the Indochinese regions of the Mekong River and its associated tributaries and estuaries. The book is a result of freshwater fish surveys in the region from 2006 to 2016, which were an international project between Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and NEF. The original purpose for creating this book was to provide a detailed training manual for researchers, students and government officials working in the region. Additionally, the authors had hoped that the colorful photos, keys, and maps would help to foster interest in ichthyology and help to recruit budding scientists to the field. I would say right from the start the authors have definitely achieved the goals set out for the book. This book contains page after page of beautiful images and detailed illustrations that form the backbone for what a book of this subject should do: provide simple, accurate and easy to follow summaries of the fishes in the region and provide tools for identification.

The authors begin with a summary of all recorded families of fishes found in the region and then transitions into an atlas of fish diversity with detailed species accounts accompanied by dichotomous keys. Each species account is accompanied by a detailed description of the fish, including the citation for its description, along with images of key characters that aid in identification. A few species accounts include images of fish freshly caught from their native streams and rivers as well as habitat photos.

The book is very easy to navigate, and I had no issues getting to a particular family from the family key or finding species of interest from the index. The characters highlighted for each species account were very easy to understand and were observable in any species I tried to identify using their guides. I think the length of the book and ease of use lend to it being a book one might carry along in the field for conducting field identifications, which is extremely helpful and not often considered by authors of such books.

Most books of this type are largely composed of text and simple figures or photos without much personality. This book is far from that. The authors frequently include images of local people and researchers interacting with fishes. This brings in a wonderful human element to connect the reader with the rivers, lakes, streams, and the people who live there. I frequently found myself turning page after page just to see what images the authors included along with the species accounts. It isn't just a guide, it's also a photo atlas of the people and places along the Mekong River.

The photos of the habitats for some of the groups were very helpful in putting things into context. I loved the images showing morphological and color pattern characters that can be used from the shoreline (e.g., dorsal color patterns seen from above—like in some of the *Rasbora* species) or the species as seen in native water clarity and color, which can help to identify sampling sites ahead of time. Additionally, high resolution photos of juvenile characters and changes through ontogeny are invaluable when it comes to identifying some species, and these are much appreciated for the groups in which they were included.

While the book is a pleasure to look at and use, there are a few things that could have made it a little more user-friendly. A few species images for live fishes could be better, a few images are out of focus, or are too small, or of a non-descript fish in a net which provides little information to the reader beyond knowing it is the fish in question because the authors told us. Such images stand out because most of the images are so well taken. In some cases, I think the authors could have benefited from engaging someone to do some simple line drawings of some characters that are more difficult to see in photographs.

While the text accompanying the species accounts frequently mentions similar species, there are a few groups of fishes (particularly the genera *Schistura*, *Rasbora*) that could have benefited from more notes on “similar fishes you might confuse with this taxon” and why. Frequently, as field biologists, we second-guess ourselves and make simple mistakes that these types of guides can help us avoid by showing what we might have called it and why it's wrong! On a similar note, there are a few confusing higher taxonomic placements, for example several Nemacheilids are placed in Balitoridae, and mudskippers and blind gobies should be in Oxudercidae.

Fishes of the Indochinese Mekong, in my opinion, far exceeded what the authors set out to do with this publication. We have long awaited a detailed guide to the fishes of this region, and they delivered this and more. This book will provide new ichthyologists working in the region a guide to learn from and will give the seasoned ichthyologists a reference that is just as useful in the lab, classroom, or field. I think this format will set the tone for future books of this type to up their ante in creating a book that is not only useful but interesting and pleasing to look at. This book is just an incredibly well crafted, detailed and accurate guide to fishes in the region, and it is a love letter to the land, water, fishes and most importantly the people

who study, live, work and grow with the river. This is a work that will be on the shelves of every ichthyologist who studies Southeast Asian fishes for decades to come.

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