

ASPECTS OF THE BIOLOGY OF LABEO FISHERI (TELEOSTEI:  
CYPRINIDAE), AN ENDEMIC THREATENED SPECIES FROM THE  
UPPER MAHAWELI RIVER SYSTEM

by

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Labeo fisheri (Jordan & Starks, 1917) the mountain labeo, is an endemic freshwater fish of Sri Lanka, confined to the upper part of the Mahaweli river. It is found in rocky areas where the current is strong and within these areas it favours the bottom or pools and crevices among boulders. It is considered a valuable food fish. L. fisheri is listed as an endangered species by the IUCN.

The habitat and survival of L. fisheri is at present threatened, due to the damming of the Mahaweli river. This has resulted in the replacement of riverine conditions by lacustrine conditions. The consequent loss of habitat would be a threat to the survival of this species.

This study was undertaken to investigate its present distribution and aspects of ecology and biology which are hitherto unknown. In this study it has been recorded from the Mahaweli river at Polgolla, Lewella, Kandy, Adikarigama and below the Minipe anicut as well as from the Amban Ganga at Elehera, where its population density appears very low. It feeds on detritus, diatoms and algae, scraping the surface of rocks with its thick, horny lips. Analysis of the maturity stages of gonads, gonosomatic indices and oocyte diameter patterns indicate that it is a single spawner, breeding during the months of January through March. The maximum and minimum sizes recorded are 46cm and 19cm respectively.

This study shows that the distributions range of L. fisheri is very limited and even within this range most of the habitats are modified by the creation of reservoirs. As such, very few undisturbed locations are left with suitable habitats for L. fisheri. Thus conservation measures are urgently required to ensure the survival of the species.