

Foreword

The *Handbook of Freshwater Fishes of West Asia* is the first attempt to bring information on all the freshwater fishes of that area under a single cover. Because of the generally arid climate, the aquatic fauna of West Asia is usually considered depauperate, with little diversity. In fact, this only reflects the lack of knowledge. Jörg Freyhof, Baran Yoğurtçuoğlu, Arash Jouladeh-Roudbar, and Cüneyt Kaya show that this is an erroneous perception. They recognise 597 native species present today in these waters. This number will certainly increase as several areas are still poorly surveyed or even ichthyological *terrae incognitae* (or maybe better *aquae incognitae*!). Not less than 259 species have been discovered since 2000. Several other species that were described by earlier authors and later considered indistinguishable have been re-examined and revalidated.

The authors have travelled in most countries of West Asia and have collected and observed fishes in most river drainages. They have reviewed the published data, they have examined museum specimens, and they have consulted with numerous colleagues. During these 18 years, they also published 180 papers and one book on the fish fauna of West Asia. They are probably the most qualified ichthyologists to compile such a book. Almost all species from West Asia are figured in colour, each is accompanied by up-to-date nomenclature, diagnoses, information on distribution, habitat, biology, and conservation status.

Aquatic biodiversity has long been overlooked in conservation strategies and it is only in recent years that their

importance and distinctness has been paid due attention. In the mostly arid landscapes of West Asia, global warming has led to even smaller precipitations, to reduced flow in rivers, to lower level of lakes and springs and increased salinity, even to desiccation. Water abstraction for agriculture, homes, and industrial usages contribute their share in habitat disturbance. Introduced fishes have preyed and eaten to extinction native species, modified habitats, and imported their pathogens. These and other factors result in the rarefaction, extirpation, and even extinction of several fish species. In fact, 238 (41 %) of the freshwater fish species of West Asia are threatened and 12 of the named species are already extinct. Not to mention those that became extinct before we even knew of their existence.

In our quickly changing world, hard, hands-on scientific data are vital to manage and conserve aquatic biodiversity. Communication between all involved is needed, from scientists to conservationists, to decision-makers, and to the public. This information must be compiled and made widely available. The *Handbook of the Freshwater Fishes of West Asia* is an important tool to disseminate knowledge, especially as it is available as an open-access version allowing everybody to download it for free. It will help promote more research and contribute to the conservation of West Asian aquatic biodiversity.

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The Old City of Jerusalem with the “Dome of the Rock” on top of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.