

Preface

Why an open-access book? The cost and logistics of buying a heavy book like *Freshwater Fishes of West Asia* is a challenge. Only those who are enthusiastic, work in the field, or love printed books would invest in ordering a copy, which they can do. This book is published as open-access to reach far beyond this circle. We hope it will be read by a much broader audience in all parts of the world. This includes those who may have had only a marginal interest in fish and their environment before downloading this book.

Why is this book being written at a time when few people read anymore and when most, if not all, information is available on the internet? Because both of these statements are simply untrue. Very little of the information presented in the *Handbook of Freshwater Fishes of West Asia* is readily available online—and if it is available at all, it is embedded in hundreds of journal publications and local language books. In fact, this book is the only one that makes the vast amount of information available to everyone. Above all, this book is urgently needed. More and more people today are interested in nature and biodiversity, and freshwater biodiversity, including fish, is declining rapidly. This process is accelerating enormously, especially in West Asia. This book is the last opportunity to inform the wider public, including those in the conservation, management, and scientific communities, about what we still have before much of it is gone.

Only this book provides detailed information on the freshwater fishes of West Asia that is available to experts and non-experts alike. As it is published as an open-access book, it is easily accessible to all interested parties free of charge. It brings together the relevant and authoritative information needed to understand and work on freshwater biodiversity in the region and far beyond. In addition, for the first time, all species are illustrated in colour, and detailed distribution maps are presented. There are also many critical notes for future research, as there is still much to be done. Hopefully, this book will soon be outdated as new research becomes available.

The authors of this book have devoted much of their professional careers to studying freshwater fishes and

their environments, and it was only by working together that they could gather information dense enough to make the *Handbook of Freshwater Fishes of West Asia* possible. It has been a significant effort to compile all the distribution records, images, and additional information to publish this book in a convenient and accessible format. The information presented is based on the combined fieldwork of the authors over many years and on the contributions (published and unpublished) of many other colleagues whose names are listed in the acknowledgments. Work on this book began in 2006, and over the next 19 years, we went to the field, examined material, prepared keys and diagnoses, and compiled images and distribution details.

This book aims to provide critical insights and knowledge about freshwater fishes and their habitats to a broad audience and raise awareness of the unique and wonderful world of freshwater fishes and their range of eclectic habitats, sometimes in remote mountainous areas but just as often in springs, rivers, and streams close to villages and towns.

This book fills a critical gap. Freshwater fish are an often forgotten but highly endemic and endangered element of biodiversity. Fish and their ecosystems are usually ignored when setting conservation priorities, planning infrastructure projects, and managing water resources. The authors hope to change this situation.

This book is an essential guide for anyone interested in freshwater fishes and the broader issues of biodiversity and ecology. It is also an essential resource for those studying and working in wetland and aquatic species conservation; those planning, developing, and managing protected natural areas and resources; those responsible for environmental impact assessments; those planning land use management; and those approving investment projects in freshwater ecosystems. It will also be of similar interest to naturalists and citizen scientists who want to know which fishes are found in the rivers, streams, and lakes in their area; those who study fishes and their diversity; and international readers interested in the biodiversity of West Asia and freshwater fishes in general.