Proceedings of the Mongolian Biodiversity Databank Workshop: Assessing the Conservation Status of Mongolian Mammals and Fishes: III – Fishes: Assessment Results and Threats

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Abstract

The Mongolian Biodiversity Databank Workshop was held at the National University of Mongolia and Hustai National Park from 31st October to 4th November, 2005. As part of the workshop, a working group of fish experts assessed the conservation status of all Mongolian fishes using the IUCN Categories and Criteria. Of the 64 fish species found in Mongolia, 48 were assessed, with 16 considered Not Applicable (NA) by the working group. Only one species, the Siberian sturgeon (*Acipenser baerii*) was assessed as Critically Endangered (CR) in Mongolia, however six species were assigned Endangered (EN) status. Four were found to be Vulnerable (VU) and three were assessed to be Near Threatened (NT). Forty-eight percent of Mongolian fishes were Data Deficient (DD) and 25% were Least Concern (LC). The north-east of Mongolia was most species rich, particularly the Onon River basin and Buir Lake. There was no trend for where the most threatened species occurred as they were found throughout the north of Mongolia. Hunting/fishing was the greatest threat to Mongolian fishes, followed by resource extraction and pollution.

Keywords: *biodiversity, extinction risk, fish, Mongolia, taimen, threat*

Introduction

Fish have not traditionally been a part of the Mongolian diet or economy, so historically species were relatively unaffected by human presence. However, by the close of the 20th century, new pressures were coming to bear on Mongolian society, driving a new – mainly commercial – interest in the inhabitants of Mongolia's many water-bodies. Experts on Mongolian fish were brought together for the Mongolian Biodiversity Databank workshop (held at the National University of Mongolia and Hustai National Park from 31st October to 4th November, 2005) to assess the status of Mongolian fishes using the IUCN Categories and Criteria, and to discuss threats affecting the species and what conservation measures were needed to address them.

Despite its many large lakes and rivers, Mongolia's fishes have received relatively little scientific attention. Results from this workshop hope to rectify this both for the charismatic species such as the taimen (*Hucho taimen*), and for less well-known fish. The working group on fishes were able to create distribution maps for species, so the most species rich zones could be identified, and those

regions with the highest number of threatened species. These sites will therefore be those most needing protection. As well as assessing the threatened status of fish, direct threats affecting their persistence were discussed. The increase of mining in Mongolia, especially along waterways in the north, is putting Mongolia's fishes at risk due to inorganic pollution and localised habitat loss and degradation. However, it is the substantial increase in fishing of all fishes at all times of the year that poses the biggest and most immediate threat. Without baseline information about species it is hard to conserve them. The information amassed at this workshop should help policy makers address how the law can be used to help fish under threat, and will also alert NGOs and scientists about species and regions most in need of research and protection.

Results and Discussion

The distribution of Mongolian fishes

Fish richness in Mongolia appears to be roughly demarcated into four regions (Figure 1). The north-eastern region had the highest species rich-