Rhinogobius cf. *similis* Gill, 1859, a goby new to the fish fauna of Iran and the problem of alien invasions

by Brian W. Coad and Asghar Abdoli

Abstract: A species of goby, *Rhinogobius* cf. *similis*, is reported and described as an alien species from the Hari River basin of Iran. Other potential invaders of this river basin are suggested and their impact discussed.

Kurzfassung: *Rhinogobius* cf. *similis*, eine Gründling-Art, wurde im Einzugsgebiet des Hari-Flusses im Iran nachgewiesen und wird als Neozoon beschrieben. Andere potenzielle Neusiedler werden aufgelistet und ihr Einfluss diskutiert.

Key words: Gobiidae, *Rhinogobius*, Iran, alien species.

Introduction

The Hari River rises in the mountain range known as the Selseleh-ye Kuh-e Baba in north-western Afghanistan, flows west for about 490 km to the Iranian border, northwards for 160 km as the Afghanistan-Iran border and then enters Turkmenistan at Sarakhs where it is known as the Tedzhen River. Its waters are lost in the Kara Kum Desert. The Kara Kum Canal takes its waters from the Amu Darya, a separate drainage basin flowing to the Aral Sea. The canal will eventually extend for 1372 km through southern Turkmenistan, the longest irrigation canal in the world (SAL'NIKOV 1995). The canal intersects both the Hari River and the similarly endorheic Murgab River and is a corridor for native fish dispersal between three previously isolated river basins and for the spread of alien or exotic species deliberately or accidentally introduced.

The purpose of this paper is to identify and describe an alien goby species (family Gobiidae) collected in Iran and to discuss potential invaders to Iranian waters from the canal. Documentation of alien species is important in order to track their dispersal and apprise managers of threats to native species and ecosystems.

Results

Five specimens of a gobiid fish were collected near Sarakhs, Iran, in the Hari River at 36°30'N, 61°10'E on 7 February 1996. Water depth was 35–120 cm, river width 12–27 m, turbidity 15 cm, water temperature 12°C, bed type was coarse gravel, and slope 1%. The specimens are juveniles, indicating that reproduction has taken place in Iranian waters.

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