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RR Raut

Department of Zoology,
Yogeshwari Mahavidyalaya
Ambajogai, Dist. Beed, (MS)
India

GD Suryawanshi

Department of Zoology,
Yogeshwari Mahavidyalaya
Ambajogai, Dist. Beed, (MS)
India

AR Kurhe

Department of Zoology, P.V.P.
College, Pravaranagar, Loni,
Dist. A. Nagar, (MS) India

RV Bhagde

Department of Zoology, S.N.
Arts, D.J.M. Commerce and
B.N. Sarada College
(Autonomous), Sangamner,
District Ahilyanagar,
Maharashtra, India

Review Article: Freshwater Fish Biodiversity Conservation in Maharashtra

RR Raut, GD Suryawanshi, AR Kurhe and RV Bhagde

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Abstract

Freshwater ecosystems in Maharashtra are rich in biodiversity and provide essential ecological, economic, and social services. However, this biodiversity, particularly freshwater fish species, faces severe threats from habitat destruction, pollution, invasive species, and overfishing. This review highlights the current status, challenges, and strategies for conserving freshwater fish biodiversity in Maharashtra. Using detailed methodologies and in-depth analysis, the article explores recent advancements, knowledge gaps, and actionable measures for conservation.

Keywords: Biodiversity, habitat destruction, pollution, invasive species

Introduction

Maharashtra is endowed with diverse freshwater ecosystems, including rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and wetlands, which support a rich array of freshwater fish species (Kharat *et al.*, 2012) ^[2]. These ecosystems are integral to the state's ecological balance and livelihood of local communities. However, increasing anthropogenic pressures have led to habitat degradation, threatening aquatic biodiversity (Dahanukar *et al.*, 2004) ^[1]. This review critically examines the challenges and opportunities for freshwater fish biodiversity conservation in Maharashtra, focusing on recent studies and conservation initiatives.

Methodology

Literature Review

A systematic review of peer-reviewed journals, books, and government reports was conducted. Databases such as Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar were searched using keywords like "freshwater fish biodiversity Maharashtra," "conservation strategies," and "aquatic ecosystems."

Field Surveys and Data Collection

Data from recent field surveys conducted by various researchers and organizations were analyzed. Methods included:

- **Electrofishing and Gill Netting:** Standard methods to collect fish samples for species identification.
- **Environmental DNA (eDNA):** Advanced molecular techniques to identify species from water samples.
- **Habitat Assessment:** Geospatial tools and direct observation to document habitat conditions.

Threat Assessment

Threats were categorized using frameworks such as the IUCN Red List criteria and Threats Classification Scheme.

Analysis of Conservation Interventions

Existing policies, community-based programs, and NGO-led initiatives were evaluated to identify gaps and propose improvements.

Corresponding Author:

RR Raut

Department of Zoology,
Yogeshwari Mahavidyalaya
Ambajogai, Dist. Beed, (MS)
India

Current Status of Freshwater Fish Biodiversity in Maharashtra

Maharashtra harbors approximately 216 species of freshwater fish, with several endemic and threatened species (Jayaram, 2010) ^[3]. Prominent river systems like Godavari, Krishna, and Tapi host diverse ichthyofauna. Notable species include *Deccan Mahseer* (*Tor khudree*), *Clarias magur*, and *Puntius spp.*, many of which are listed as vulnerable or endangered (Dahanukar *et al.*, 2012) ^[2].

Threats to Freshwater Fish Biodiversity

Habitat Destruction

- **River Fragmentation:** Construction of dams has altered natural flow regimes (Poff *et al.*, 2007) ^[6].
- **Urbanization and Industrialization:** Increased pollution has degraded aquatic habitats.

Overfishing

- High demand for ornamental and food fish has led to unsustainable harvesting practices.

Invasive Species

- Introduction of species like *Oreochromis mossambicus* has displaced native fish populations (Kharat *et al.*, 2003) ^[5].

Climate Change

- Rising temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns have disrupted breeding cycles.

Conservation Strategies

1. Policy and Regulation

- Strengthen the implementation of the Biodiversity Act, 2002.
- Regular monitoring of fish populations under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

2. Community-Based Conservation

- Engage local communities in sustainable fishing practices and habitat restoration (Singh *et al.*, 2014) ^[7].

3. Habitat Restoration

- Rejuvenation of degraded wetlands and riparian zones through afforestation and pollution control.

4. Research and Monitoring

- Expand the use of eDNA and GIS tools for real-time monitoring of fish biodiversity.
- Establish freshwater biodiversity conservation centers.

5. Awareness and Education

- Conduct awareness programs to highlight the ecological and economic importance of freshwater fish.

Discussion

Effective conservation of freshwater fish biodiversity in Maharashtra requires a multi-pronged approach. Community participation, coupled with scientific interventions, can yield long-term benefits. Challenges such as funding constraints, lack of public awareness, and enforcement gaps need immediate attention. Recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of integrated watershed management in promoting biodiversity conservation (Joshi *et al.*, 2020) ^[4].

Conclusion

Maharashtra's freshwater fish biodiversity is at a critical juncture. Immediate action is required to address threats and implement sustainable conservation measures. A combination of policy support, scientific research, and local community involvement can pave the way for effective biodiversity management.

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