

**D-03 The species composition of ichthyofauna in the Victoria, Randenigala,  
Rantambe Sanctuary**

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The Victoria, Randenigala Rantambe (VRR) Sanctuary (42,000 ha) is situated in the Mahaweli ichthyological province. The sanctuary harbors a vast area of aquatic habitats including 3 reservoirs (5580 ha) across river Mahaweli, 144 km of main rivers and 807 km of streams. A study was carried out during April 1996 to March 1997 to determine the species composition and status of ichthyofauna within the aquatic habitats of the VRR sanctuary to facilitate their future management and conservation. The aquatic habitats were sampled using cast nets, hand nets, and an electric shocker. The fishermen catch was also investigated.

A total of 30 freshwater fish species belonging to 14 families were recorded in the survey and these included 6 endemic species and 7 introduced species. The endemics recorded included; *Garra ceylonensis*, *Esomus thermoicos*, *Labeo fisheri*, *Puntius bimaculatus*, *Schistura notostigma* and the relict *Belontia signata*. The introduced forms included one cyprinid, three cichlids, one osphronemid, one belontid and one poeciliid. Majority of the species were found in rivers (40.6%), followed by reservoirs (34.4%), streams (18.8%) and ponds (6.3%). Relative abundance data indicated that 20% of the fish species recorded were very common, while 43.3% were common, 23.3% were uncommon, 10% were rare and 3.3% were very rare.

The construction of impoundments across Mahaweli river has benefited the introduced forms such as Tilapia, Carp and Gouramy. However, the breeding migratory movements of the 2 species of freshwater eels (*Anguilla* spp) has been hindered by the dams and the rare and threatened Mountain Labeo (*Labeo fisheri*) has been displaced from its original habitat. Migratory bridges should be incorporated into dams to facilitate the migratory movement of fishes.

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