

Chapter 8

Fishes of the Sipaliwini and Kutari Rivers, Suriname

*Philip W. Willink, Kenneth Wan Tong You, and
Martino Piqué*

SUMMARY

Forty-three sites near three camps along the Sipaliwini and Kutari rivers, Suriname were sampled between August 19 and September 5, 2010. We recorded 99 species of fishes. This diversity is high compared to the rest of the world, but is typical for the Guiana Shield. We collected eight species of fishes potentially new to science, including a large catfish with spines along the body and a small catfish that lives in sand-bottomed creeks. Two species are new records for Suriname. We collected 57 species at Kutari (Site 1), 60 species at Sipaliwini (Site 2), and 63 species at Werehpai (Site 3). This is remarkably consistent, with no significant difference in diversity among camps. However, we did not necessarily find the same species at each camp. Creek assemblages were similar among the three sites. Many young fishes were found in flooded forests, even if the adults lived in rivers or other habitats. Overall, large top-level predators were uncommon. The region is exhibiting the first stages of overfishing. Many fishes still occur in the Sipaliwini area, but there is a need to assess fishing pressure and implement management plans.

INTRODUCTION

Fishes are a critical source of protein in the Kwamalasamutu region. They are a common component of many meals. To further emphasize the importance of fishes to the people living in the area, some regional geographic names are even based on local fish. For example, 'sipali' means stingray and 'wini' means river/water in Carib, of which the Trio language is part. In other words, Sipaliwini can be translated 'river of stingrays' (Boven 2006).

Despite the importance of fishes in the indigenous culture, relatively few species are routinely eaten. Most species are small and often ignored by people, but they are actually an important part of the aquatic ecosystem. Smaller fishes forage on aquatic insects and serve as prey for larger fishes, caiman, and birds. Fish diversity reflects the health of the river systems.

There is a modest amount of published information concerning the fishes of the region. Most fish surveys in the watershed are well to the north in the Corantijn proper (e.g., Vari 1982). Some fish collections have been made near regional airstrips, such as those at Kwamalasamutu and the Sipaliwini Savanna. These specimens were then used as the basis for species descriptions (e.g. Gery 1961) or reviews of specific taxonomic groups (e.g. cichlids by Kullander and Nijssen 1989). Ouboter and Mol (1993) reported 75 species in the Curuni/Sipaliwini basin, a much larger area than was surveyed during this expedition. Any other information is unpublished. To our knowledge, there have been no prior scientific fish collections in the Kutari River or Wioemi Creek. This expedition was the first, and will serve as a baseline for subsequent aquatic biodiversity studies.