

THE NEW EXPLORERS

Freshwater fish studies in Brunei

Over the past few years, Brunei has been visited by staff and students from the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, Singapore, participating in joint field work with local institutions on the diverse freshwater fish fauna there. Various habitats, including lakes, freshwater swamps and peat swamps, have been surveyed, and several new species of freshwater fishes have been identified, as a result of these studies.

During a recent visit in October 2001, we collaborated with staff of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam on a field study of Borneo suckers (genus *Gastromyzon*). These are flattened fishes that inhabit the upper reaches of river systems throughout Borneo. Their pectoral and pelvic fins form a skirt or suction disc around their abdomen, enabling the fish to cling and

manoeuvre on smooth rock surfaces without getting swept away by strong currents. They feed on algae and other organisms growing on the rocks.

From specimens obtained, morphological data will be collected, and live colour patterns and ecological observations noted. These will then be compared with congeners in the rest of Borneo. Preliminary findings from this trip indicate at least three of the five species in the Belalong area are new to science.

Their ability to cling tightly to rocks or river bottoms makes Borneo suckers difficult fishes to obtain for studies. One collecting method we tried was to set a net downstream of a bunch of rocks, and then kick the rocks to dislodge whatever fishes may be hiding there into the

net. A more gentle method involved positioning the net downstream of a rock, and running our hands over the rock to chase Borneo suckers into the net.

Another method was to quickly lift a rock out of the water and hold it over a net. If they are present, Borneo suckers will drop in.

As well as sampling, we also snorkelled in order to observe the fish's feeding and social behaviour. Despite the strong currents, we were able to view fishes that we otherwise couldn't see from above the water because they hide under rocks.

- Kelvin K. P. Lim & Tan Heok Hui



Rasbora kottelati, a recently described species from Brunei



Gastromyzon lepidogaster (lateral view)



A view of Sungei Belalong from the top



Kelvin doing field work in the fast waters of Sungei Belalong

