

Foreword

The neat little book you have in your hand results from the confluence of important new trends of the last decades.

The first trend is the wide accessibility of sophisticated technology, such as underwater cameras, which have made the documentation of underwater life easier than ever before. The second trend is the creation of large databases of biological information on the biodiversity of the Earth and its oceans. The latter trend is best exemplified by FishBase, the online encyclopedia of fishes (see www.fishbase.org), which enabled to attach to the fish photographs in this guide to be straightforwardly connected to a rich array of biological information. This information links the fishes in this local guide to the wider world of Indo-Pacific fishes, their function in ecosystems, and the reasons why we need to protect them.

The third trend is reflected in the nationalities of the authors who collaborated on this field guide, written in English, and who are Chinese and Indonesian. When I worked in Indonesia, in 1975 and 1976, such collaboration would not only have been practically impossible to organize, but simply unthinkable. Yet, it is now an obvious thing to do: China and Indonesia are neighbours, and there is no reason for their marine biologists not to cooperate on jointly studying and documenting fish biodiversity, wherever this may be. That this guide is in English is also remarkable, part of a fourth trend, and a good sign as well: we now all accept this language as neutral mean of communication, whether we are Chinese, Indonesian as its authors are, or French and Canadian, as I am.

Thus, this field guide, besides contributing knowledge of some of the fish of North Sulawesi, also document the huge progress that we have made in the last decades, not only with our technology, but also in abolishing barriers between people.

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