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**Original Article** 

# Abundance study of fish species from Hel River of Kokrajhar, Assam, India

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#### Abstract

Hel River is an important river of Kokrajhar district of Assam, India, which is a great source of freshwater fish. Considering the availability of indigenous fish species in Hel River and consumption of these species by the local people, the prime objective of this study was to study the fishes in the river. The relative abundance of fishes along with the species richness and species evenness were calculated based on fish samplings from August 2014 to July 2015. A total of 1313 individuals belonging to 25 species were recorded, dominated by family Cyprinidae with nine species. The highest relative abundance was recorded for *Barilius bendelisis* (15.31%) followed by *Garra gotyla* (14.09%) and *Barilius barna* (13.78%). This study may serve as an important baseline for sustainable management of Hel River.

Keywords: Cyprinidae; freshwater fish; Hel River; relative abundance; species evenness

#### 1 | INTRODUCTION

Biodiversity is the study of variety and variability of life that exists on earth, which includes quantity, variety and distribution, ranging through genetics to species, populations, communities and ecosystems (Gowda et al. 2015; Hashemi et al. 2015). It starts with a measure of the number of species that make up a biological community and is considered one of the most significant aspects of the community organisation and structure (Ahmed et al. 2018). This provides a brief idea about the species diversity and richness, which designates the key elements of biodiversity (Yadav and Mishra 2013). Omoike (2021) also mentioned that relative abundance and species richness are the key elements of biodiversity in the aquatic system and have been recommended as a tool for ecological risk assessment. Temesgen et al. (2021) stated that the study of relative abundance and distribution can provide more insight into the factors that affect the structures of fish species. Biodiversity is the foundation of the vast array of ecosystem services that contribute significantly to human wellbeing (Rayal *et al.* 2021). It indicates the potential of any aquatic system and also depicts its trophic status (Kumar *et al.* 2011). Therefore, the study of biodiversity is essential for stabilisation of ecosystem and protection of overall environmental quality for understanding intrinsic worth of all species on the earth (Tessema and Mohamed 2016). However, biological diversity is the variability among living organisms at all levels and from all sources including marine, terrestrial and other aquatic ecosystem (Rayal *et al.* 2021). So, the study of biodiversity is important for sustainability of natural resources and the biological evaluation which is also a useful tool for measuring the ecological value of the aquatic ecosystems (Jafari and Gunale 2006).

The most common natural biodiversity study is fish diversity within different locations because fishes are very important from the biodiversity point of view, enjoying different ecosystems, habitats and niches of the aquatic environment (Parvathy 2018). Abundance and richness of fishes is an important indicator of ecological health of an aquatic ecosystem. Fishes are important part of an aquatic food chain which consume plankton and small animals and also serve as food for predator animals occupying higher position in the trophic level; commercially important fishes can improve the livelihood of the people dependent on them (Thirumala and Kiran 2017). Fishes are commonly found in marine and freshwater environments of which, in the past three decades, freshwater biodiversity has been declining faster than either marine or terrestrial biodiversity (Jenkins 2003). It was also reported that biodiversity is often ambiguously misused or overused to describe population dynamics of a community or location and the rivers and streams are facing several environmental complications throughout the world and is largely connected to anthropogenic activities in their catchment areas (Tessema and Mohamed 2016).

Freshwater fishes are declining worldwide due to multiple factors including overexploitation, habitat degradation, climate change, pollution and water extraction, making them the most threatened group of vertebrates in the world (Foote et al. 2020). Freshwater biodiversity in particular area is currently facing a global crisis (Hu et al. 2019). Therefore, it is very crucial to have the idea of the diversity of fish species, distribution, and abundance for the development of conservation and management programmes. With this regard, studies of temporal and spatial patterns of diversity, composition and distribution of fish species of freshwater are important to be examined that may influence the structure of fish community (Galacatosa et al. 2004). Biodiversity also disturbs the capability of living systems to respond in changes of the environment, supports of ecosystem function and provides the ecosystem services that sustenance the human well-being (Hooper et al. 2005; Diaz et al. 2006).

Based on the abundance of fish species, India is having one of the most diversified and the largest natural resources in the world (Vivekanandan 2013; Mohanty et al. 2015). The information on the abundance and diversity of the fish species is the main obligatory for management policy (Chaki et al. 2014; Galib 2015; Galib et al. 2016). The diversity of any natural community partially depends on the conditions of the environment and unfortunately, interferences of anthropogenic activities are diminishing the living resources due to degradation of coastal habitats affecting the fish diversity (Chowdhury et al. 2011). Many studies have been reported the diversity of freshwater fishes in India (e.g. Jayaram 1994; Mogalekar and Canciyal; Singh et al. 2021). Nonetheless, many aquatic habitats received no or less attention from researchers. Hel River in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam, India is one such river and therefore, the present work aims to describe the fish species diversity of Hel River through systematic samplings.

# 2 | METHODOLOGY

The fish specimens were collected from Hel River located near the Serfanguri of Kokrajhar district (26.56°N 90.13°S, altitude - 57.9 m, accuracy: 2.0 m, bearing - 48.21°), Assam. Sampling of the fish species was done on monthly basis, comprised of both morning and night samplings, from August 2014 to July 2015. For sample collection, three fishing nets including the case net (1 - 2 m diame)ter, mesh size of 0.05 cm), scoop net (mesh size of 0.25 cm) and fishing mosquito net were employed. The water depth of the fishing sites of the river was 0.61 to 1.5 m, measured by conventional method. The fish specimens were taken into specimen jars containing preservative (4% formalin) for morphological characterisation to confirm identification with the help of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), located at Shillong, Meghalava. All the chemicals used were of analytical grade. IUCN Redlist status of fish species are based on IUCN (2021). The fish samples were counted and the relative abundance (%) was calculated using the following formula (Win and Myint 2020):

Relative abundance (%) = (Total number of individuals in each of a species / Total number of individuals of all the observed species) × 100.

## 3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 3.1 Fish species and IUCN redlist status

The scientific name, local name, family and order of the fishes studied from Hel River along with the IUCN conservation status of fishes are shown in Table 1. A total of 25 fish species belonging to five orders (Cypriniformes, 17 species; Siluriformes, 5 species; Synbranchiformes, 1 species; Anguilliformes, 1 species; Perciformes, 1 species) and ten families (Cyprinidae, 12 species; Sisoridae, 3 species; Psilorhynchidae, 2 species; Botiidae, 2 species; Anguillidae, 1 species; Mastacembelidae, 1 species; Siluridae, 1 species; Cobitidae, 1 species; Ambassidae, 1 species; Bagridae, 1 species) were recorded.

Four Near Threatened species (*Labeo pangusia*, *Neolissochilus hexagonolepis*, *Anguilla bengalensis* and *Tor tor*) were recorded along with 16 Least Concern species (Table 1). In addition, one Endangered (*Tor putitora*) and three Vulnerable (*Cyprinion semiplotum, Wallago attu* and *Botia rostrate*) species were also recorded. Occurrence of fish species varied with time of the year which may be due to varying environmental conditions.

It was reported that the occurrence of fish species in a particular area depends on the environmental factors including water temperature, pH, salinity, dissolved oxygen and other factors (Gowda *et al.* 2015). Due to the tolerance capability in other environments, fishes were grouped into several conservation categories (IUCN 2021). Gupta and Michael (1992) recorded that physical and chemical variables such as air temperature, rainfall and water temperature showed a fairly wide seasonal variation. They recorded a total of seventeen species belonging to five families and eight genera from Meghalaya, India. Bhat (2003) studied the diversity and composition of freshwater fish species from Western Ghats, India, and in the study, a total of 10771 individuals belonging to 92 species representing 25 families and 48 genera, excluding family Cyprinidae, were reported. Bisht et al. (2009) reported that the difference in availability of fish fauna is directly related to the nature of profile and slope of tributary, which affects the migration and breeding grounds of the fishes. Vijaylaxmi and Vijaykumar (2011) conveyed that the Cyprinidae family was observed to be the most dominant among all the other families in their study. Sarkar et al. (2012) recorded a total of 143 fish species belonging to 11 orders, 72 genera and 32 families from the river Ganges, India. Basavaraja et al. (2014) reported 25 fish species belonging to four orders, nine families and 18 genera and found that the order Cypriniformes was the most predominant one followed by the order Siluriformes, Perciformes and Osteoglossiformes.

It has been shown that the regulation of water has an impact on species richness, relative abundance and habitat heterogeneity (Rumana *et al.* 2015; Galib *et al.* 2018). Mohanty *et al.* (2015) reported that greater diversity values may be because of the abundant availability of the food resources and appropriate environmental situations. Badoni (2017) mentioned that the availability of fish fauna is directly related to the profile of the stream, the natural pattern of temperature, organic resources, discharge of water and water chemistry.

The present study also reports fish diversity of Hel River and showed that the Cyprinidae family is the dominant family. In the present investigation, a total of nine Cyprinid fish species (*Barilius bendelisis*, *B. barna*, *Garra gotyla*, *Chagunius chagunio*, *Cyprinion semiplotum*, *Tor putitora*, *Labeo pangusia*, *Raiamas bola* and *Neolissochilus hexagonolepis*; Figure 1) were authenticated by the Zooloagical Survey of India (ZSI) at Shillong, Meghalaya.

CypriniformesBotiidaeRaniBotia darioLCGobitidaePoiaCanthophrys gongotaLCCyprinidaeKabri periBarilius barnaLCCyprinidaeKabri periBarilius bendelisisLCPitkataChagunius chagunioLCBhangnaCirrhinus rebaLCVutia puthiCyprinion semiplotumVUZebrafishDanio rerioLCSiltokaGarra gotylaLCGhoiraLabeo pangusiaNTVulukNeolissochilus hexagonolepisNTVulukNeolissochilus hexagonolepisNTPsilorhynchidaeGolPsilorhynchus nudithoracicus-PsilorhynchidaeRitaRita ritaLCSiluridaeRitaRita ritaLCSiluridaeBoalWallago attuVU	Order	Family	Local name	Scientific name	Conservation status <sup>a</sup>				
BotiaBotia rostrataVUCobitidaePoiaCanthophrys gongotaLCCyprinidaeKabri periBarilius barnaLCCyprinidaeElangBarilius bendelisisLCPitkataChagunius chagunioLCPitkataChagunius chagunioLCVutia puthiCyprinion semiplotumVUZebrafishDanio rerioLCSiltokaGarra gotylaLCGhoiraLabeo pangusiaNTVulukNeolissochilus hexagonolepisNTVulukNeolissochilus hexagonolepisNTPailorhynchidaeGolPsilorhynchus nudithoracicus-PsilorhynchidaeGolPsilorhynchus sucatioLCSilturiformesBagridaeRitaRita ritaLCSiluridaeBoalWalago attuVU	Cypriniformes	Botiidae	Rani	Botia dario	LC				
CobitidaePoiaCanthophrys gongotaLCCyprinidaeKabri periBarilius barnaLCElangBarilius bendelisisLCPitkataChagunius chagunioLCBhangnaCirrhinus rebaLCVutia puthiCyprinion semiplotumVUZebrafishDanio rerioLCSiltokaGarra gotylaLCGhoiraLabeo pangusiaNTVulukNeolissochilus hexagonolepisNTVulukNeolissochilus hexagonolepisNTOngatorTor putitoraENPuthitorTor torNTPsilorhynchidaeGolPsilorhynchus nudithoracicus-BagridaeRitaRita ritaLCSiluriformesBagridaeRitaWallago attuVUSiluridaeBoalWallago attuVU			Botia	Botia rostrata	VU				
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Vuluk       Neolissochilus hexagonolepis       NT         Chela       Raiamas bola       LC         Jongator       Tor putitora       EN         Puthitor       Tor tor       NT         Psilorhynchidae       Gol       Psilorhynchus nudithoracicus       -         Baluchata       Psilorhynchus sucatio       LC         Siluriformes       Bagridae       Rita       Rita rita       LC         Siluridae       Boal       Wallago attu       VU			Ghoira	Labeo pangusia	NT				
Chela     Raiamas bola     LC       Jongator     Tor putitora     EN       Puthitor     Tor tor     NT       Psilorhynchidae     Gol     Psilorhynchus nudithoracicus     -       Baluchata     Psilorhynchus sucatio     LC       Siluriformes     Bagridae     Rita     Rita rita     LC       Siluridae     Boal     Wallago attu     VU			Vuluk	Neolissochilus hexagonolepis	NT				
Jongator     Tor putitora     EN       Puthitor     Tor tor     NT       Psilorhynchidae     Gol     Psilorhynchus nudithoracicus     -       Baluchata     Psilorhynchus sucatio     LC       Siluriformes     Bagridae     Rita     Rita rita     LC       Siluridae     Boal     Wallago attu     VU			Chela	Raiamas bola	LC				
Puthitor         Tor tor         NT           Psilorhynchidae         Gol         Psilorhynchus nudithoracicus         -           Baluchata         Psilorhynchus sucatio         LC           Siluriformes         Bagridae         Rita         Rita rita         LC           Siluridae         Boal         Wallago attu         VU			Jongator	Tor putitora	EN				
Psilorhynchidae     Gol     Psilorhynchus nudithoracicus     -       Baluchata     Psilorhynchus sucatio     LC       Siluriformes     Bagridae     Rita     Rita rita     LC       Siluridae     Boal     Wallago attu     VU			Puthitor	Tor tor	NT				
Baluchata     Psilorhynchus sucatio     LC       Siluriformes     Bagridae     Rita     Rita rita     LC       Siluridae     Boal     Wallago attu     VU		Psilorhynchidae	Gol	Psilorhynchus nudithoracicus	-				
SiluriformesBagridaeRitaRita ritaLCSiluridaeBoalWallago attuVUSiceridaeTengraGagata ceniaLC			Baluchata	Psilorhynchus sucatio	LC				
Siluridae Boal <i>Wallago attu</i> VU	Siluriformes	Bagridae	Rita	Rita rita	LC				
Sicoridao Tongra Gagata cania IC		Siluridae	Boal	Wallago attu	VU				
Sistinuae Teligia Guyutu telilu LC		Sisoridae	Tengra	Gagata cenia	LC				
Telchitta Glyptothorax telchitta LC			Telchitta	Glyptothorax telchitta	LC				
Pahari Tangna Gogangra viridescens LC			Pahari Tangna	Gogangra viridescens	LC				
Anguilliformes Anguillidae Nangdor Anguilla bengalensis NT	Anguilliformes	Anguillidae	Nangdor	Anguilla bengalensis	NT				
Synbranchiformes Mastacembelidae Zig zak baim Mastacembelus armatus LC	Synbranchiformes	Mastacembelidae	Zig zak baim	Mastacembelus armatus	LC				
Perciformes Ambassidae Chanda Parambassis ranga LC	Perciformes	Ambassidae	Chanda	Parambassis ranga	LC				

TABLE 1 Local name, scientific r	ame, family, and order alon	g with IUCN status of fish	species found in the Hel River, As-
sam.			

IUCN conservation status: En, Endangered; LC, Least Concern; NT, Near Threatened; VU, Vulnerable; -, Not evaluated <sup>a</sup>, Source: IUCN (2021)

## 3.2. Abundance of fishes

A total of 25 species represented by 1313 individuals were captured from Hel River. This indicated that Hel Riv-

er is rich in fish diversity with varying numbers of species. Higher individuals (more than 100) were found from November to April (Table 2). The highest number of individuals (195) was found in January whereas the lowest (58) was recorded in July. Relative abundance (RA) showed

that the species belonging to Cyprinidae family dominated Hel River.



FIGURE 1 Fish species of Cyprinidae in Hel River, Assam.

# **TABLE 2** Month- and species-wise abundance of fish species in Hel River of Kokrajhar, Assam.

Colontific nome	Sampling months									Tatal	DA (0/)			
Scientific name	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	– Total	RA (%)
Botia dario	0	0	0	2	1	2	3	2	0	0	0	0	10	0.76
Botia rostrata		0	0	0	2	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	8	0.61
Canthophrys gongota	0	2	4	3	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	1.07
Barilius barna	9	16	13	14	13	19	23	13	20	18	13	10	181	13.78
Barilius bendelisis	9	5	18	12	21	40	25	35	10	9	11	6	201	15.31
Chagunius chagunio	6	3	9	5	10	8	12	15	10	13	9	4	104	7.92
Cirrhinus reba	2	4	0	6	7	9	5	2	3	0	1	0	39	2.97
Cyprinion semiplotum	9	5	3	2	9	15	10	13	11	9	5	11	102	7.77
Danio rerio	0	0	0	2	1	3	2	3	2	0	0	0	13	0.99
Garra gotyla	10	8	10	5	11	33	31	26	20	15	9	7	185	14.09
Labeo pangusia	4	6	3	2	6	10	16	11	13	6	2	3	82	6.24
Neolissochilus hexagonolepis	2	3	6	9	8	6	8	10	5	4	3	4	68	5.18
Raiamas bola	7	5	6	11	6	9	10	6	4	3	3	1	71	5.41
Tor putitora	4	6	5	8	7	12	11	9	10	5	7	6	90	6.85
Tor tor	0	0	0	3	0	5	2	0	0	1	0	4	15	1.14
Psilorhynchus nudithoracicus	3	0	9	6	18	9	8	5	4	2	3	0	67	5.10
Psilorhynchus sucatio	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.23
Rita rita	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0.15
Wallago attu	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0.15
Gagata cenia	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	4	0	0	0	0	9	0.68
Glyptothorax telchitta	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.23
Gogangra viridescens	0	1	2	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0.68
Anguilla bengalensis	0	0	0	3	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	9	0.68
Mastacembelus armatus	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.15
Parambassis ranga	0	4	6	4	0	3	1	4	0	0	0	2	24	1.83
Total	65	68	94	105	127	195	174	163	113	85	66	58	1313	

The relative abundance was the highest for Barilius bendelisis (RA, 15.31%) followed by Garra gotyla (RA, 14.09%) and B. barna (RA, 13.78%) whereas it was the lowest for Danio rerio (RA, 0.99%; Table 2). Abundance of several fish species has been reducing day by day due to the lack of their proper environmental conditions and other factors. Therefore, the abundance study through systematic sampling is very important for knowing the species number and also the seasonal effects on the relative abundance of fish species. The species richness varies due to various factors like available nutrients, seasonal change, habitats, fish behaviour, fishing effort, size and life stages of fishes, water level and turbidity of water (Tessema and Mohamed 2016). However, aquatic species is declining rapidly due to habitat degradation, anthropogenic activities, exotic species introduction, pollution, water diversions and global climate change (Vijaylaxmi et al. 2010).

## 4 | CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that Hel River is rich in fish species, dominated by family Cyprinidae. It also reports the seasonal variation of fish species, their abundance and redlist status which can be used as a reference for future research work.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

APS involved in sample collection, data analysis and manuscript preparation; SD supervised the study, participated in manuscript review and editing; SB supervised the study, participated in manuscript review and editing.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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