

Book Review

Peixes do Rio das Velhas: Passado e Presente.

Incluindo a tradução da monografia *Velhas-Flodens Fiske, 1875*, de Chr. Fr. Lütken.
Carlos Bernardo Mascarenhas Alves and Paulo dos Santos Pompeu, Organizadores

The rio das Velhas rates high in terms of name recognition for students of Neotropical freshwater ichthyology. The fame of this region derives both from its interesting fauna and in particular from the ground-breaking publication by the Danish ichthyologist Christian Frederick Lütken, who in his 1875 monograph *Velhas-Flodens Fiske* set a new standard for the study of South American freshwater fishes. In that publication Lütken, working with the excellent collections of fishes made by Johannes Reinhardt in the rio das Velhas basin, provided the first in-depth study of the fish fauna within a single river basin in South America. The detailed species descriptions, accompanied in many cases by excellent illustrations of both whole fishes and details of external anatomy, were a major advance over previous publications and set a new standard for this type of monograph. The utility of Lütken's study was hampered, however, by the fact that the primary taxonomic accounts were in Danish, a language that is unfamiliar to the vast majority of researchers engaged in research on Brazilian freshwater fishes. Although *Velhas-Flodens Fiske* ended with a brief synopsis in Latin, a language somewhat more accessible for many researchers, the overall language barrier presented a major impediment to the utilization of Lütken's monograph for the next thirteen decades.

With the publication of *Peixes do Rio das Velhas: Passado e Presente*, this roadblock to our understanding of Lütken's study has been swept away both for researchers in Brazil and the vast majority of scientists interested in the South American freshwater fish fauna. Drawing on the expertise of L.P.R. Vaz and V.P. Iannini, the Danish and Latin texts, respectively, have been translated into Portuguese and, thus, made readily available. The text is accompanied by fine quality reproductions of the original figures at full size. The translated text, which would have been an invaluable contribution on its own, has been supplemented by additional informative sections. Introductory sections by A.H. Lisboa and R.E dos Reis, respectively discuss the translation effort within the context of the Projecto Manuelzão, the commendable effort to revitalize the basin of the rio das Velhas, and provide an overview of the

importance of the translation for Brazilian ichthyology. These are supplemented by insightful comments by L.P.R. Vaz on the translation.

In the first chapter H.A. Britski provides excellent overviews of Reinhardt's collections and of the publications by Reinhardt and Lütken that were based on that material. He supplements those comments with a summary of other expeditions that yielded fish specimens from the São Francisco system. Britski's historical perspective also includes remarks on species first described as new in *Velhas-Flodens Fiske*, a discussion of the location of the types of the species collected by Reinhardt, and a very useful listing of the present taxonomic equivalents for all of the species that were reported from the Reinhardt collections from the rio das Velhas basin. Chapter 2, the translation of Lütken's monograph, is followed by a very useful detailed summary of the fish fauna of the basin of the rio das Velhas at the end of the 20th Century by C.B.M. Alves and P.S. Pompeu based on recent collecting efforts throughout the basin including the regions sampled by Reinhardt. These recent collections put the earlier collecting efforts in a historical context, demonstrating the degree to which Reinhardt was able to effectively sample the fish fauna in some regions despite the limitations that he faced, and also highlight the fact that new species remain to be discovered even in a river system such as the rio das Velhas that has been sampled for many decades. One can only hope that this informative summary accelerates ongoing efforts to conserve and rehabilitate this important ecosystem.

Undoubtedly this volume will serve as a valuable resource for all researchers studying the South American freshwater fish fauna. The coordinators, translators, and contributors all are to be congratulated for bringing this effort to fruition.

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