

## First Records of *Rhinogobius lindbergi* (Teleostei: Gobiidae) and *Abbottina rivularis* (Teleostei: Cyprinidae) in the Lake Buyr Drainage, Mongolia

David A. Neely<sup>1,\*</sup>, Mark H. Sabaj Perez<sup>2</sup>, and Bud Mendsaikhan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>California Academy of Sciences  
875 Howard St.  
San Francisco, California 94103

<sup>2</sup>Academy of Natural Sciences  
1900 Benjamin Franklin Parkway  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103

<sup>3</sup>Institute of Geoecology  
Baruun Selbe-13  
Ulaanbaatar 211238, Mongolia

**ABSTRACT.** We report the first records of Amur goby, *Rhinogobius lindbergi* and the Chinese false gudgeon, *Abbottina rivularis* from the Lake Buyr drainage of eastern Mongolia. Both species were previously known only from much farther downstream in the Amur River basin. Because of their abundance at three sites separated by 11 km in Lake Buyr and a tributary stream, and presence of multiple size classes, we strongly suspect that these species are established. Both species have been widely dispersed outside of the Amur River basin as contaminants in cultured, large-bodied cyprinids (*Ctenopharyngodon*, *Hypophthalmichthys*, *Parabramis*), and we suggest that this is the most likely means of their introduction into Lake Buyr. The long-term impacts of these species on the native ichthyofauna are unknown, but unlikely to be positive. We suggest that immediate measures be taken to monitor their dispersal, and to prevent similar introductions in the future.

**INDEX WORDS:** Fishes, Gobiidae, Cyprinidae, introduced, invasive, non-indigenous, Asia, Amur River.

### INTRODUCTION

Human-mediated dispersal of non-indigenous organisms plays a major role in the homogenization of native faunas on a global scale (Sheldon 1988, Rahel 2000). Aquatic faunas in general, and large lakes in particular, are disproportionately impacted (Witte *et al.* 1992, Ricciardi and Maclsaac 2000). Invasive aquatic species are introduced through a wide range of possible mechanisms, are nearly impossible to eradicate once established, and may have far-reaching and unexpected impacts (Witte *et al.* 1992, Fuller *et al.* 1999, Clout 2005, Mooney and Cleland 2001). The impact of within-basin translocations is harder to quantify, but in large,

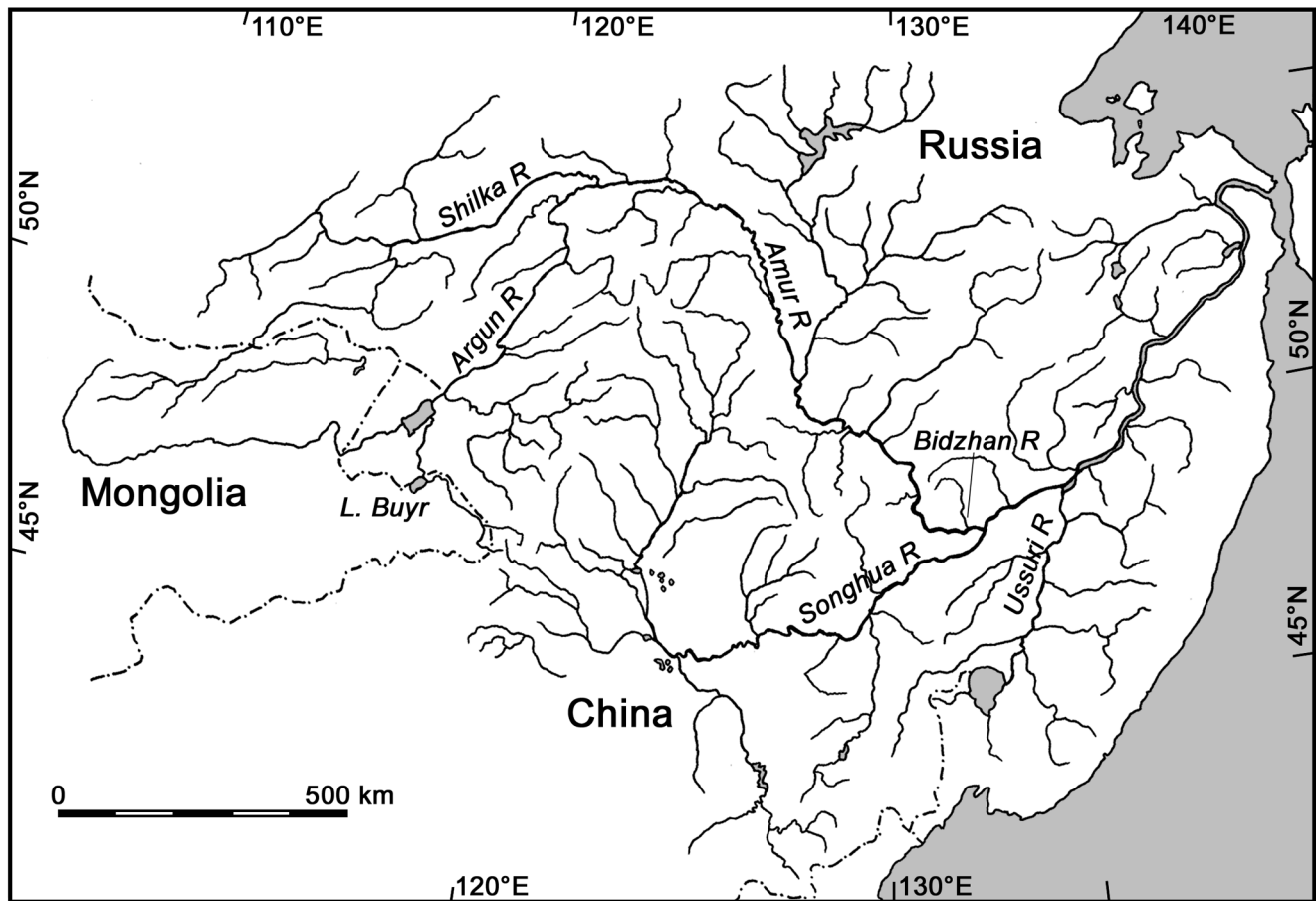
heterogeneous drainages translocations may be as damaging as inter-basin movement.

A survey of fishes in the upper Amur River drainage of eastern Mongolia during August, 2006 resulted in the discovery of two fishes native to the lower Amur River but not previously recorded from the upper Amur River. Neither species had previously been reported from Mongolia. Herein we discuss these species, the level of threat they pose to the native ichthyofauna, and suggest a likely mechanism for their introduction.

### STUDY AREA

Lake Buyr (also occasionally spelled Lake Buir or Buyr Nuur) is a large (615 km<sup>2</sup> surface area), shallow (10 m maximum depth) natural lake, on the

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: dneely@calacademy.org



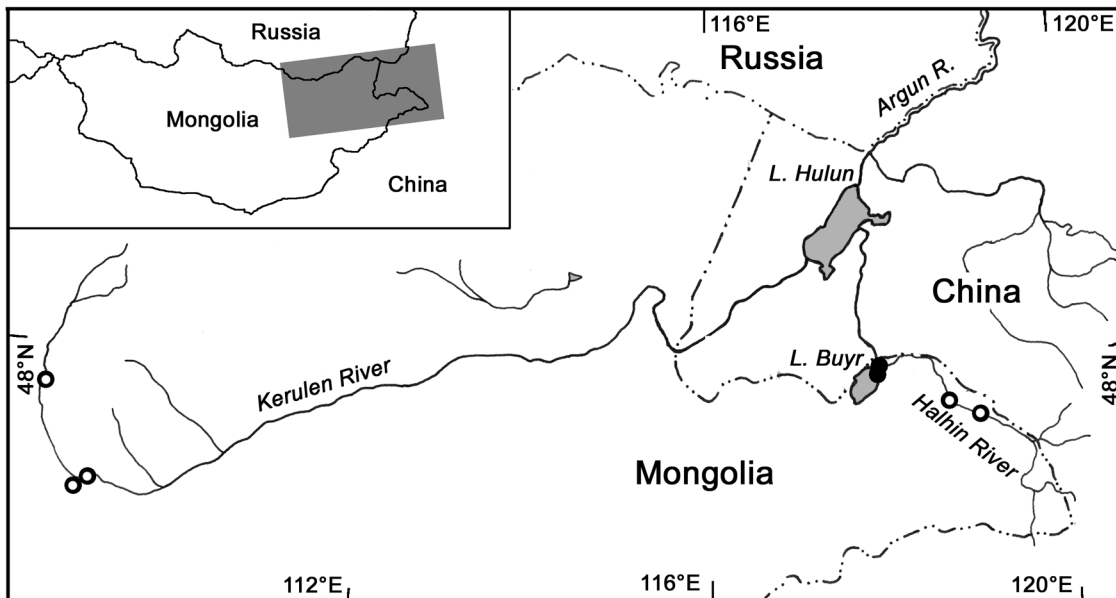
**FIG. 1.** Amur River drainage. Mouth of Bidzhan River represents previous upstream record for *Rhinogobius* in the drainage.

eastern border between Mongolia and China (Figs. 1, 2). The lake is surrounded by dry, sandy steppe, and the bottom is composed primarily of sandy substrates. The lake receives and is also drained by the Halhin River, which flows north into Lake Hulun and eventually to the mainstem Amur River (which is formed by the confluence of the Argun and Shilka rivers). The Kerulen River is a large tributary to Lake Hulun that drains from the Kentai Mountains in central Mongolia eastward, entering China just east of the city of Choybalsan.

Lake Buyr previously supported an important commercial fishery as well as a diverse fish community of > 40 species, but catches have declined precipitously since the 1980s (Dulmaa 1999, Kottelat 2006). Lake Buyr is still intensively fished by the Chinese, especially during winter, when large nets are pulled by truck under ice cover (M. Erdenebat, pers. comm., Institute for Geoecology, Baruun Selbe-13, Ulaanbaatar 211238, Mongolia).

## METHODS

We sampled several sites in the Lake Buyr drainage during late August 2006 as part of a survey of the fishes of the Amur River drainage of Mongolia. We used a 3.6 m × 1.3 m haul seine with 3.1 mm mesh, a 9 m × 1.3 m bag seine with 9.5 mm mesh, or a backpack electrofishing unit, depending on current velocity, water depth, substrate composition, and density of aquatic vegetation. We attempted to sample all habitats present at each site, and retained specimens of all species encountered. Captured fishes were anesthetized with clove oil (0.05 mL L<sup>-1</sup>), preserved in 10% formalin or 95% ethanol, and deposited into the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia (ANSP), Pennsylvania, USA; Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, USA (STL); or a reference collection at the Institute of Geo-Ecology, Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia. A list of vouchered specimens is provided below in the



**FIG. 2.** Lake Buyr and surrounding area, with localities of capture of *Rhinogobius lindbergi* and *Abbottina rivularis* depicted by closed symbols; other localities in drainage sampled during August 2006 depicted by open symbols. Shaded box in inset corresponds to extent of larger map.

Appendix. Selected specimens of each species were photographed prior to preservation in the field. Contents of the digestive tract of subsamples of fish specimens were identified to the finest taxonomic level possible under a dissecting scope and enumerated. Standard length is abbreviated as SL.

## RESULTS

On 28–29 August 2006 we collected 263 specimens (SL 17–30 mm) of Amur goby, *Rhinogobius lindbergi* Berg (Fig. 3) at two sites along the northeast shore of Lake Buyr (elevation 578 m) and at one site in the Halhin River (elevation 582 m) approximately 4 km upstream from its confluence with the lake (Fig. 1). At the same localities we also collected 12 specimens (SL 33–58 mm) of Chinese false gudgeon *Abbottina rivularis* Basilewsky (Fig. 4). Both represent first records for Mongolia.

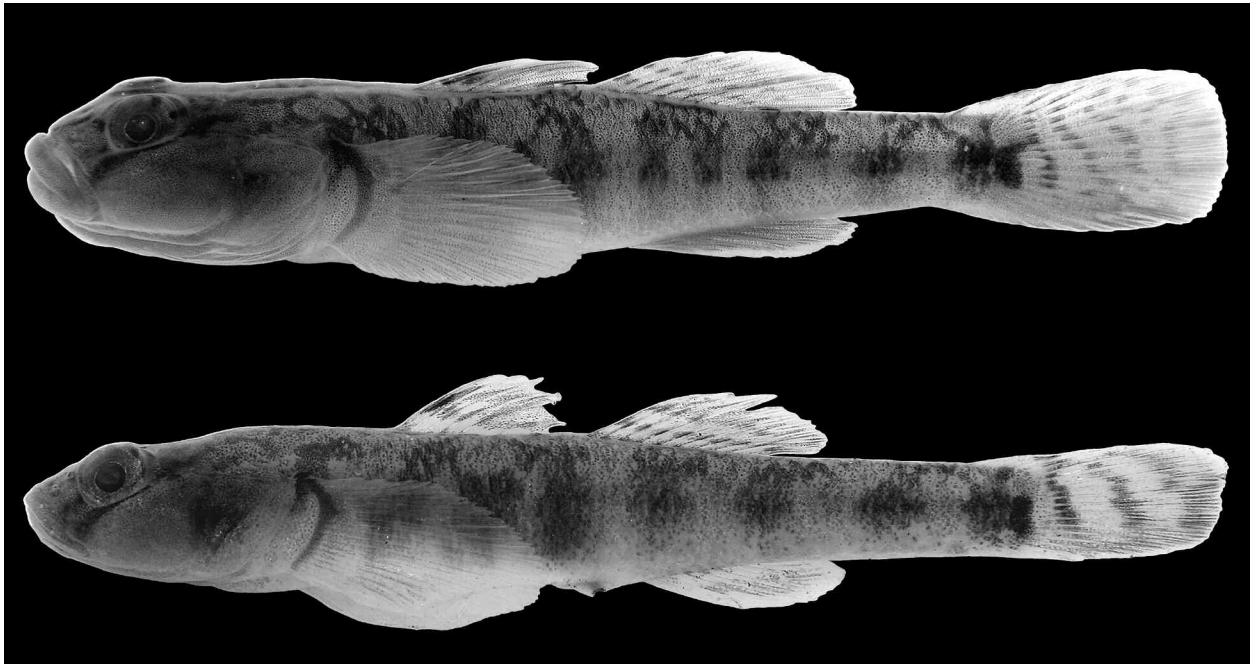
Neither species was found at two additional sites on the Halhin River, approximately 100 and 120 km upstream from its mouth near the town of Halhbol, Mongolia, elevation 679–707 m, nor were they collected at several sites in the upper portion of the the Kerulen River (Fig. 2). Given their current abundance, and as the lake and its tributary streams have been thoroughly sampled in the past (Sokolov 1983, Dulmaa 1999), we do not feel that these species

would have escaped notice in prior sampling efforts.

In the Halhin River, both *Rhinogobius lindbergi* and *Abbottina rivularis* were collected in near-shore habitats with silty substrates at depths of from 0.1–1.2 m. The main channel was composed almost entirely of shifting sand, and both species were notably absent from this habitat. In Lake Buyr, both species were most abundant along the wave-swept shoreline (depths < 0.5 m), and less abundant away from shore over open sand. The lake had a high concentration of *Spirulina* algae, which dramatically reduced water clarity. Other species collected in these efforts are listed in Table 1.

Examination of digestive tract contents of 20 Amur gobies revealed microhabitat-associated differences in food items; the predominant food item in 10 specimens from ANSP 185372 (a shallow, heavily vegetated cove of Lake Buyr) was ostracods (abundant), with much lesser numbers of chironomids (uncommon) and a single ephemeropteran. In contrast, 3 of 10 specimens from ANSP 185223 (Halhin River,) had recently ingested small (~1 mm in diameter) fish eggs, likely from cyprinids. Other food items included chironomids (abundant), odonates (uncommon), and hymenopterans (uncommon).

Digestive tract contents of five *Abbottina rivularis* (ANSP 185398) were primarily (~80% of organic



**FIG. 3.** *Rhinogobius lindbergi*, ANSP 185223, 30 mm SL (top), 29 mm SL (bottom). See <http://silurus.acnatsci.org/ACSI/field/Mongolia2006/> for color version of same photo of live specimens.

matter) ostracods, with a large quantity of ingested sand grains (~50% by volume). Chironomids and terrestrial hymenopterans were uncommon (< 5%).

Food items observed in both taxa appeared to reflect the most common benthic invertebrates at each site. Given this, dietary overlap with other small-bodied benthic invertivores is expected to be substantial. We suggest that other benthic fishes in Lake Buyr and its tributaries (*Gobio cynocephalus* Dybowski, *Microphysogobio anudarini* Holcik and Pivnicka, *Sarcocheilichthys soldatovi* (Berg), *Saurogobio dabryi* Bleeker) may be particularly im-

pacted by competition with Amur goby and Chinese false gudgeon.

Length-frequency distribution of 227 specimens of *Rhinogobius lindbergi* (Fig. 5) suggests the presence of two year-classes. Gonads of larger specimens (> 23 mm SL) of both sexes of *Rhinogobius* were resorbing, suggesting that they had spawned earlier in the year. Some specimens as small as 23 mm SL displayed bright sexually dichromatic patterns, suggesting attainment of reproductive maturity during their first year. Sex ratio in 20 specimens was 11 males:9 females.



**FIG. 4.** *Abbottina rivularis*, ANSP 185399, 49 mm SL. See <http://silurus.acnatsci.org/ACSI/field/Mongolia2006/> for color version of same photo of live specimen.

**TABLE 1. Additional fish species collected at each locality supporting invasive species.**

Location	Family	Scientific Name	Common Name	
Halhin River	Cyprinidae	<i>Acheilognathus asmussii</i> (Dybowski)	Russian bitterling	
		<i>Cyprinus rubrofuscus</i> Lacepède	Asian wild carp	
		<i>Gobio cynocephalus</i> Dybowski	Siberian gudgeon	
		<i>Leuciscus waleckii</i> (Dybowski)	Amur ide	
		<i>Pseudaspius leptcephalus</i> (Pallas)	redfin	
		<i>Pseudorasbora parva</i> (Temminck & Schlegel)	stone moroco or topmouth gudgeon	
		<i>Rhodeus sericeus</i> (Pallas)	Amur bitterling	
		<i>Rhynchocypris lagowskii</i> (Dybowski)	Amur minnow	
		Cobitidae	<i>Cobitis melanoleuca</i> Nichols	none
			Salmonidae	<i>Brachymystax lenok</i> (Pallas)
Lake Buyr	Cyprinidae	<i>Acheilognathus asmussii</i>	Russian bitterling	
		<i>Carassius gibelio</i> (Bloch)	crucian carp	
		<i>Cyprinus rubrofuscus</i>	Asian wild carp	
		<i>Eupallasella percnurus</i>	lake minnow	
		<i>Hemiculter leucisculus</i> (Basilewsky)	sharpbelly	
		<i>Gnathopogon strigatus</i> (Regan)	Manchurian gudgeon	
		<i>Gobio cynocephalus</i>	Siberian gudgeon	
		<i>Gobio</i> sp.	none	
		<i>Leuciscus waleckii</i>	Amur ide	
		<i>Microphysogobio anudarini</i> Holcik & Pivnicka	none	
	Cobitidae	<i>Pseudaspius leptcephalus</i>	redfin	
		<i>Pseudorasbora parva</i>	stone moroco or topmouth gudgeon	
		<i>Rhodeus sericeus</i>	Amur bitterling	
		<i>Rhynchocypris lagowskii</i>	Amur minnow	
		<i>Cobitis melanoleuca</i>	none	
		<i>Misgurnus mohoity</i> (Dybowski)	none	
		Odontobutidae	<i>Perccottus glenii</i> Dybowski	Amur sleeper
			Siluridae	<i>Silurus asotus</i> (Linnaeus)

The lower numbers of specimens of *Abbottina rivularis* preclude a detailed length-frequency comparison, but the size range of specimens suggests representation of more than a single year-class. Gonads in specimens > 40 mm SL were resorbing, suggesting spawning earlier in the summer.

## DISCUSSION

The Amur River basin is a large, heterogeneous basin, and many fish species are restricted to different portions of the basin (Bogutskaya and Naseka 1996, Froufe *et al.* 2003, Kottelat 2006). The low-gradient middle and lower portion of the Amur River basin supports a very different fish fauna than does the upper portion or upland tributaries. Gradient of the mainstem Amur River within the native range of both *Abbottina rivularis* and *Rhinogobius lindbergi* ranges from 0.08–0.12 m\*km<sup>-1</sup>, while in upstream areas the gradient is higher, ranging from 0.22–0.3 m\*km<sup>-1</sup>. We suspect that this difference in gradient historically inhibited upstream dispersal of

both species. Intra-basin transfer of fishes from one subbasin to another can contribute to homogenization of ichthyofaunas (Rahel 2000). Species transferred from different sub-basins are effectively non-indigenous, and can have the same catastrophic effects as species from external basins.

*Rhinogobius* spp. have been distributed widely outside of their native range, including the Middle East (Al-Hassan and Miller 1987, Coad and Abdoli 2000, Wonham *et al.* 2000), Central Asia (Kopylets and Dukravets 1981, Kamilov and Urchinov 1995, Salnikov 1998), Russia (Bogutskaya and Naseka 2002), as well as from portions of China to which it is not native (Yang 1996, Neely unpubl. data) and the Columbia River drainage of the western United States (Fuller *et al.* 1999.).

*Rhinogobius lindbergi* is native to the lower and middle portion of the Amur River (Berg 1965, Novomodny *et al.* 2004), and was previously known to extend upstream only to the vicinity of the mouth of the Bidzhan River, Russia (Fig. 1), approximately 1,060 km east and 1,800 river km

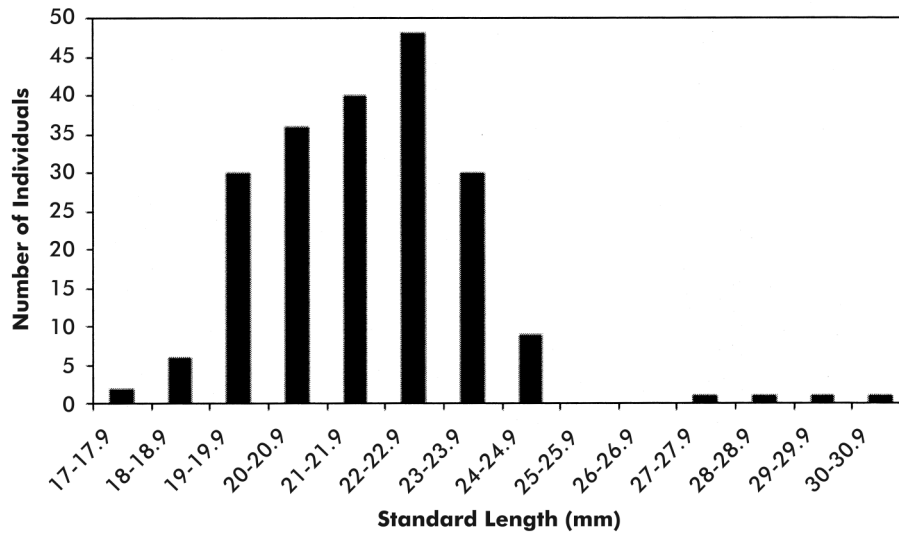


FIG. 5. Length-frequency distribution of *Rhinogobius lindbergi* ( $N = 227$ ) from the Lake Buyr drainage.

downstream of Lake Buyr. *Abbottina rivularis* is native to portions of Korea, China, and Japan (Kim 1997, Masuda *et al.* 1984, Yue 1998), and reaches its northern natural limit in the middle and lower portions of the Amur River basin (Bogutskaya and Naseka 1996, Novomodny *et al.* 2004). It reaches a maximum size of about 95 mm SL (pers. obs. D.A. Neely).

Identification as part of the *Rhinogobius lindbergi* complex was verified by I.-S. Chen, Institute of Marine Biology and Life Sciences, Taiwan. They differ from nominal *R. lindbergi* by having 28 vertebrae (vs. 27 in *R. lindbergi*, pers. comm. I.-S. Chen, 2007). *Rhinogobius lindbergi* reaches a maximum size of 43 mm SL (Berg 1965).

Introduced gobies have decimated populations of small-bodied, native fishes in North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia through predation on eggs, larvae, and adults (Hoese 1973, Middleton 1982, Charlebois *et al.* 1997, Stepien and Tumeo 2006), and through competition for habitat (Brittan *et al.* 1970) or prey items (Jude *et al.* 1995, French and Jude 2001) or nest interference (Janssen and Jude 2001). While the small adult body size of *Rhinogobius lindbergi* might be expected to reduce the potential impacts of this introduction, this species can reach very high densities and could as a result have substantial effects on eggs or larval fishes of other species.

*Abbottina rivularis* has also been widely introduced outside of its native range, including Europe (Grabda and Heese 1991, Hanel and Novák 2002),

Central Asia (Kamilov and Urchinov 1995, Salnikov 1998), Russia (Bogutskaya and Naseka 2002), Thailand (Vidthayanon and Kottelat 1995), and Laos (Kottelat 2001). In the Salween drainage of China and adjacent Myanmar, they are now one of the dominant, small-bodied benthic fishes in slow-moving pool habitats with sandy or silty substrates (Neely, unpubl. data). Following their introduction into Fuxian Lake, China, shifts in reproductive timing, growth rates, and fecundity of gobies were observed (Yan and Chen 2007), suggesting that the species is plastic and can rapidly adapt to local conditions. While this species has not yet been implicated in declines of native fishes, given its omnivorous diet and overall similarity to many of the endemic species of *Gobio* and *Microphysogobio*, the potential for negative impacts are considerable.

We hypothesize that the likely mechanism for introduction of the exotic fishes discussed herein is as contaminants in introductions of commercially-cultivated fishes. Records of large-bodied Chinese carps (*Ctenopharyngodon*, *Hypophthalmichthys*, and *Parabramis*) in Lake Buyr (Sokolov 1983, Kottelat 2006) are the result of stocking activities on the Chinese side of the lake. In both China and Russia, both *Abbottina rivularis* and *Rhinogobius* spp. have been introduced widely outside of their native range as contaminants in shipments of commercially valuable carps (*Ctenopharyngodon idellus* (Valenciennes), *Hypophthalmichthys nobilis* (Richardson), *Hypophthalmichthys molitrix* (Valen-

ciennes), and *Mylopharyngodon piceus* (Richardson)) stocked for fishery enhancement (Yang 1996, Bogutskaya and Naseka 2002, Neely unpubl. data).

Aquatic biodiversity in eastern Asia is under severe threat from habitat destruction, overfishing, and translocations of non-indigenous fishes (Kottelat and Whitten 1996). Of these factors, non-indigenous fishes may be the most insidious. Whereas habitat may be restored, dams will eventually fail, and stocks can sometimes recover if harvest is reduced, there is usually no way to eliminate introduced populations of exotic fishes once established. While the ichthyofauna of Mongolia has recently been summarized (Kottelat 2006) and does not include a large number of invasive, non-indigenous fishes, our discovery suggests that the pandemic of translocations and invasions currently observed in China (Yang 1996) has spread across the border. The impact of these introduced species is unknown, but may pose a substantial threat to the several species of cyprinids endemic to the Lake Buyr drainage.

We recommend that immediate measures be taken to reduce the risk of spread of these species into other water bodies in Mongolia, perhaps including educational programs or a ban on transfer of live fishes between watersheds in Mongolia. While we did not find *Rhinogobius* or *Abbottina* at any sites sampled in the Kerulen River, which drains into Lake Hulun in China and which might be expected to eventually serve as a dispersal corridor for these species, we did not sample near the border with China. Further surveys of this portion of the drainage are needed, both to monitor dispersal of these invasive species and adequately inventory the native fauna of the upper Amur River drainage.

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## APPENDIX

Materials Examined: *Rhinogobius lindbergi*. ANSP 185223 (n = 55), Halhin River ca. 2 km upstream from mouth at Lake Buyr, elev. 582 m, 47°55'32"N, 117°51'03"E. ANSP 185373 (n = 114), northeast shore of Lake Buyr, south of mouth of Halhin River, elev. 578 m, 47°51'43"N, 117°53'13"E. ANSP 185372 (n = 64), shallow cove of Lake Buyr near mouth of Halhin River, elev. 578 m 47°54'16"N, 117°51'48"E. *Abbottina rivularis*. STL uncat. (n = 2, orig. pres. in 95% EtOH), Halhin River, ca. 2 km upstream from mouth at Lake Buyr, elev. 582 m, 47°55'32"N, 117°51'03"E. ANSP 185399 (n = 2), northeast shore of Lake Buyr, south of mouth of Halhin River, elev. 578 m, 47°51'43"N, 117°53'13"E. ANSP 185398 (n = 6), shallow cove of Lake Buyr near mouth of Halhin River, elev. 578 m 47°54'16"N, 117°51'48"E.