

Diversity and assemblage of Ichthyofauna in an unexplored tropical aquatic ecosystem: Inzia River, Congo basin

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Received: 17 June 2025 / Revised: 19 September 2025 / Accepted: 30 September 2025/ Published online: 18 October 2025.

How to cite: Kaziala, D.M., et al. (2025). Diversity and assemblage of Ichthyofauna in an unexplored tropical aquatic ecosystem: Inzia River, Congo basin, Journal of Wildlife and Biodiversity, 9(3), 404-435. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17390370>

Abstract

Ichthyofauna diversity and assemblage in tropical aquatic ecosystems, particularly those of Central Africa, although rich in biodiversity, are far from being sufficiently known. The present study examines fish biodiversity along the tropical Inzia River catchment located in the Democratic Republic of Congo. From July to September 2022, a total of 22 stations were sampled and surveyed for an effort duration of 24 hours per station using various fishing equipment and techniques. These involved the use of still nets, floating lines, hawksbills, longlines, and catches from local fishermen. A total of 17,187 fish were caught, most (92.3%) of which were captured by the static net. Analysis of the data revealed 91 formally identified fish species, belonging to 57 genera, 25 families, and 12 orders. Seven adult specimens were unknown, and their fin fragments were taken and preserved for identification by DNA analysis at the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium. Fish species diversity was higher in the Inzia River than in its tributaries and showed an upward trend from the lower to the middle reaches of the basin. Our results confirm the abundant fish biodiversity in tropical aquatic ecosystems, and the unidentified individuals could probably be new species.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Longitudinal Distribution Pattern, Tropical Ecosystems, Fishing Techniques, fish

Introduction

Since the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity in Rio de Janeiro (Lévêque, 1994), new attention has been paid to the conservation of species and natural environments (Paugy & Lévêque, 2006a). With a total freshwater surface area estimated at 86,080 km², the Congolese nation (DRC) boasts a dense hydrographic network teeming with a rich and diverse fish fauna (Teugels & Guégan, 1994; Katemo et al., 2023). The DRC's estimated fish species richness of 1,551 species is the highest of any other African nation (FishBase, 2023). However, studies undertaken over the last few decades in certain rivers of the Congo Basin revealed a wealth of endemic species, genera, and families (Mutambwe, 1992; Micha & Mbenga, 2003; Mbenga, 2004; Wamuini, 2010; Ibala, 2010; Monsembula et al., 2013; Mahamba et al., 2018; Katemo, 2020; Mukabo et al., 2020; Ekyambe et al., 2023; Katemo et al., 2023). Despite the high number of species, scientific knowledge of the basin's fish fauna is still far from exhaustive (Mukabo et al., 2020; Fermon, 1996; Montchowui et al., 2007; Lévêque, 1994; Teugels & Guégan, 1994). Most studies on ichthyofauna diversity are more concentrated on the Congo River's main course, a few tributaries, and lakes that are frequently found close to urban centers (Mbimbi, 2011; Pwema et al., 2023).

The Inzia River, which serves as the western boundary between Kwilu and Kwango provinces in the DRC, is characterized by a fish diversity that remains little known to this day. This river's watershed has a dense hydrographic network, which includes a multitude of rivers of varying sizes, including the Inzia, Lukula, Luie, Kafi, and Gobarri rivers, as well as their tributaries, and numerous small lakes (UNDP & UNOPS, 1998). The Inzia basin also has hydroelectric potential. The two most important are the Lippens waterfall on the Luie River (World Bank, 2021) and Péchi, a tributary that flows into the Kafi River and forms its outlet. These act as physical barriers that can promote fish speciation (Wamuini et al., 2010; Katembo, 2020). Hydroelectric power plant dams are detrimental to the ecological balance of the river (Ovidio & Philippart, 2002; Ovidio et al., 2021). Because of these, the Inzia river basin is thought to have a high level of biodiversity, potentially including new species that are spread across multiple habitats and occupy different ecological niches.

The Inzia basin, which spans a length of 461.10 Km and includes an area of 25,711.2 km², is the source of livelihood for approximately 3,243,446 people (CAID, 2023; Wikipedia, 2024). In addition to the substantial unregulated artisanal fishing activity that is observed in the above-mentioned rivers during the dry season (UNDP/UNOPS, 1998), other activities are also developed. These include conventional animal husbandry, non-intensive aquaculture, and

traditional and industrial agriculture (Menga, 2018). Human activities that are most likely to endanger the ichthyofauna diversity of the Inzia basin are : (i) building infrastructures (bridges, homes, factories, etc.) on the edges of certain wetlands, which can change fish habitats (Ibala, 2010) ; (ii) using phytosanitary insecticides and ichthyotoxic plants to poison rivers and catch fish, which has grown and become a concern (Debojit et al., 2025) ; (iii) using less-than-smart fishing gears and techniques (mosquito netting), which can lead to overfishing and the extinction of species (Micha, 2019 ; Micha, 2017) ; and (iv) introducing allochthonous species for enrichment purposes (Congo yasika: *Heterotis niloticus*), which may contribute to the elimination of other native species or alter the functioning of aquatic habitats, thus endangering natural biodiversity (Lévêque 1994; 1995a); (v) introducing foreign species (Congo yasika : *Heterotis niloticus*), whose effects can be harmful for the natural biodiversity (Lévêque 1994, 1995a ; Lazard & Lévêque, 2009) ; and (vi) the region's artisanal diamond and timber exploitation, slash-and-burn agriculture, and firewood (FONAREED- RDC, 2017). In the worst situation, these cause the complete disappearance of the forest, which degrades the watersheds and alters the water quality due to solid and liquid inputs (soluble chemicals) (Fanny, 2012; Piégay et al., 2022).

Due to the current pressures and threats that are impacting the aquatic habitats of the Inzia River and its tributaries, sampling campaigns are scheduled to inventory the fish that are currently inhabiting the basin. The overall aim of this study is to enhance the understanding of the fish fauna in the Inzia river basin by comparing it to that found elsewhere, and to work in conjunction with stakeholders to implement strategies for the sustainable management and exploitation of fishery resources. To this end, the study's specific objectives are to: (i) highlight the diversity of ichthyofauna, (ii) ascertain the relative abundance of species, and (iii) identify the environmental variables that influence the species distribution in the environment.

Material and methods

Study environment

This research was conducted in the watershed of the Inzia River (Figure 1), which is a tributary of the Kwilu River and a sub-tributary of the Kasai River. It lies between 3.74° and 7.39° south latitude and 17.29° and 18.39° east longitude. The basin is located in the Kwilu and Kwango provinces. It is bordered to the north by the Kwilu River basin, which flows into Bagata territory, to the south by the Wamba basin in Kasongo-Lunda territory, to the east by the Kwenge basin in Bulungu and Masi-manimba territories, and to the west by the Wamba and Kwilu basins in Kasongo-Lunda and Bagata territories (Menga, 2018; UNDP and UNOPS, 1998; Google Earth, 2023).

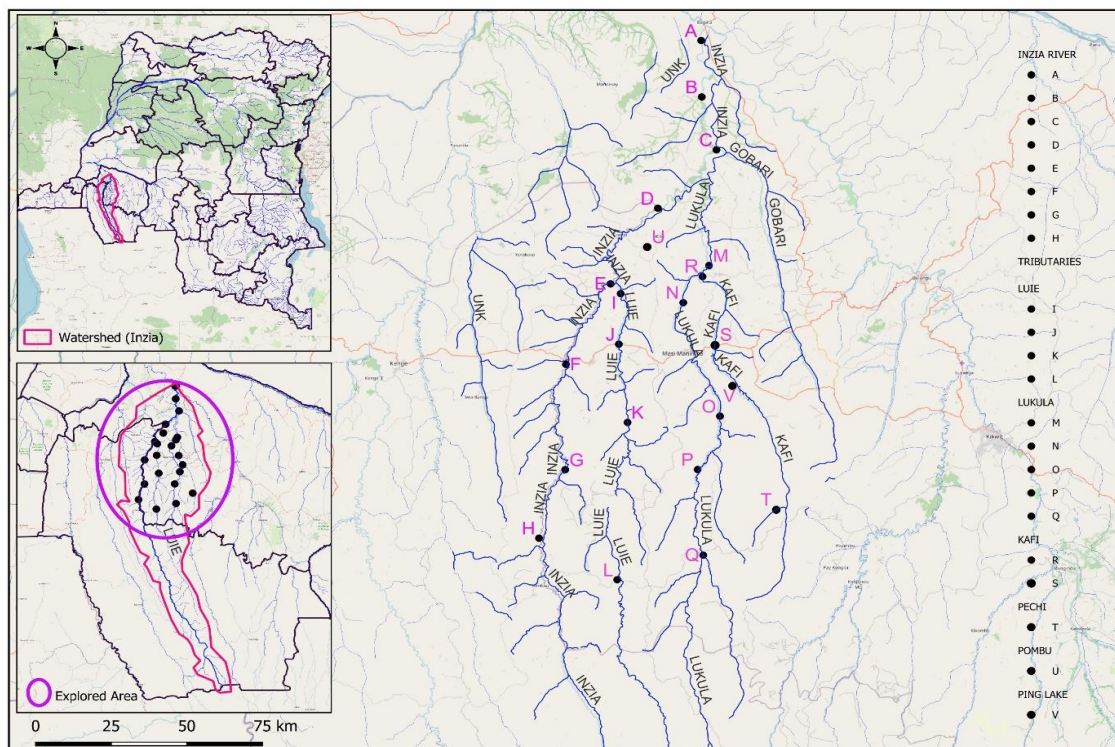


Figure 1. Map of sampling stations (A to V) in the Inzia basin hydrographic network

Fish inventories were performed along the Inzia River, from its mouth in the Kwilu River at Bagata, to the village of Kibwila, near the Moanza Protestant Mission, a distance of 182 Km as the crow flies (Google Earth, 2023). They were also made along the River Luie, from its confluence with the Inzia at the Dunda CKE oil mill, to the village of Kitona, upstream of the Lippens waterfall, in a distance of 104 Km. They were also performed, along the Lukula River, from Kimbi Nsayala, where it flows into the Inzia, to the confluence of Lukula 1 and 2, upstream of the Kingungi Catholic Mission, at a distance of 142 Km. The Kafi River was also explored from the Kimbili CKE oil mill, where it flows into the Lukula, to Kikiadi village in the Kibolo sector, where a sample was taken from the Pechi tributary upstream of the falls, a distance of 86.04 Km. Along the same river (Kafi), fish were also counted in Ping Lake, which is 1 km long and 81,804 m², or 8.18 ha in area. This small, linear natural lake is located in the village of Kiko, close to the Lumbi Catholic mission. Finally, a station was surveyed along the Pombu River, a small tributary of the Inzia, at its confluence with the Moshi River, close to the Kitoy sector chief town (Google Earth Engine, 2023).

Station selection and fish capture

Twenty-two (22) stations were selected and surveyed during the campaign from July 16 to September 02, 2022, following a watershed approach. The selection of these stations was based on the site accessibility; the typological diversity of habitats and the longitudinal profile (upstream and downstream parts of the river), according (Fig. 2). For each site, we first had to

introduce ourselves to the local authorities, then contact the fishermen's organization to solicit one or two local fishermen, and finally carry out the fishing.

Various fishing tools and techniques were employed for an effort duration of 24 hours per station, i.e., 12 hours per day. These included 10 static nets with varying mesh sizes (10, 12, 15, 20, 25, 30, and 40 mm), each unit measuring 30 m in length and 1.50 m in height. We used the floating line fishing with hooks of sizes 6, 8, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, and the scooping upstream of a tributary of the Inzia (Moshi River) at shallow depth (less than 60 cm) and low flow. Hawk fishing (15 and 20 mm mesh), and examination of local fishermen's catches were also applied (Ekyamba et al., 2023; Katemo et al., 2023).

The same fishing techniques were used at all sampled stations (Mahamba et al, 2018). At each station, the captured individuals were grouped and counted by fishing gear and dated (Wamuini, 2010; Ibala, 2010). Each identified and unidentified species was photographed (Figure 3) using a Nikon D3200 camera, and the vernacular name and geographical coordinates of the capture station determined using a Garmin 64x GPS were recorded (Table 1). The 10% of the catch was placed in small plastic fuses with a capacity of 30 liters, containing 10% formaldehyde and hermetically sealed for laboratory identification (Ngoy a Ngoy et al, 2017).

Ecological habitats characterization

From August to October 2024, a habitat characterization campaign was conducted at eight stations. These stations were selected based on their high catch abundance during the previous fishing campaign and the typological diversity of their habitats, as well as security considerations for researchers, given that some areas were experiencing political unrest. We assessed the bottom substrate at six different locations within each station and analyzed the substrate composition at the Pedology Laboratory of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at the University of Kinshasa. Water current velocity was measured using a timed floating float. Other environmental variables (Table 1) were measured using an Oyster 018180 multimeter, a pulse oximeter, an H22Px digital sonar, a Garmin 64x GPS, and a decameter. The banks were assessed based on the dominance or rarity of trees and grasses.

To assess the influence of these parameters on fish distribution, a standardized fishing method was also applied. Six static nets of 10, 12, 20, 25, and 30 mm mesh sizes, placed side by side, were used. The nets were set at 5 p.m., and fish harvesting began at 6 a.m. at all experimental stations.

Table 1. Variables measured from August to October 2024 at the ecological stations (B, D, E, H, J, N, O, and T) in the Inzia River basin. Mean $\pm$ standard deviation values. Repartition between gravel, sand, loam, clay, and dead leaves was expressed in relative abundance.

Parameters	Macurmbiem (B)	Misimbidi (D)	Dunda (E)	Kibwila (H)	Kiwawa (J)	Dondo (N)	Mukomo (O)	Pechi (T)
Width (m)	106.16 $\pm$ 5.77	82.76 $\pm$ 4.78	68.57 $\pm$ 5.19	52.6 $\pm$ 3.36	30.5 $\pm$ 3.61	29.33 $\pm$ 5.78	22.66 $\pm$ 2.26	7 $\pm$ 0.89
Depth (m)	1.95 $\pm$ 0.33	2.3 $\pm$ 0.48	2.21 $\pm$ 0.28	2.96 $\pm$ 1.5	2.53 $\pm$ 0.47	2.38 $\pm$ 0.84	2.13 $\pm$ 0.50	1.61 $\pm$ 0.23
Distance from source (Km)	448	415	392	195	254	181	139	14
Elevation (m)	270 $\pm$	271	348	371	374	368	403	662
Slope (m/Km)	0.4 $\pm$ 0.08	0.6 $\pm$ 0.14	0.8 $\pm$ 0.12	1.3 $\pm$ 0.11	0.8 $\pm$ 0.7	0.7 $\pm$ 0.10	0.9 $\pm$ 0.10	19 $\pm$ 0.13
Canopy height (m)	24.83 $\pm$ 2.22	21.16 $\pm$ 2.31	20.85 $\pm$ 1.86	24.4 $\pm$ 2.60	19.5 $\pm$ 4.46	22.83 $\pm$ 2.48	21 $\pm$ 2.09	14 $\pm$ 3.68
Canopy cover (%)	3.93 $\pm$ 3.99	6,66 $\pm$ 1,75	8.14 $\pm$ 1.32	11 $\pm$ 2.57	15.8 $\pm$ 3.45	17.33 $\pm$ 7.31	20.5 $\pm$ 8.68	74.5 $\pm$ 11.72
Water temperature (°C)	25.86 $\pm$ 0.52	24.7 $\pm$ 0.60	24.62 $\pm$ 0.24	24.1 $\pm$ 0.12	24.66 $\pm$ 0.16	25.11 $\pm$ 0.41	24.25 $\pm$ 0.28	23.1 $\pm$ 0.40
Oxygen (mg/l)	8.2 $\pm$ 0.17	8.33 $\pm$ 0.04	8.46 $\pm$ 0.10	8.64 $\pm$ 0.14	8.46 $\pm$ 0.04	8.3 $\pm$ 0.12	8.6 $\pm$ 0.22	8.96 $\pm$ 0.05
Ph	7.78 $\pm$ 0.24	7.91 $\pm$ 0.66	7.81 $\pm$ 0.12	8.03 $\pm$ 0.19	8.06 $\pm$ 0.18	7.82 $\pm$ 0.23	8.22 $\pm$ 0.16	8.59 $\pm$ 0.30
Water speed (m/s)	0.65 $\pm$ 0.08	0.88 $\pm$ 0.14	1.05 $\pm$ 0.12	1.14 $\pm$ 0.11	1.21 $\pm$ 0.07	1.05 $\pm$ 0.10	1.15 $\pm$ 0.10	1.45 $\pm$ 0.13
TDS (ppm)	2.18 $\pm$ 0.27	2.23 $\pm$ 0.36	1.98 $\pm$ 0.09	1.81 $\pm$ 0.01	1.62 $\pm$ 0.03	1.88 $\pm$ 0.02	1.65 $\pm$ 0.01	14 $\pm$ 006
Transparency (m)	0.77 $\pm$ 0.02	0.79 $\pm$ 0.06	0.72 $\pm$ 0.03	0.84 $\pm$ 0.01	0.81 $\pm$ 0.04	0.74 $\pm$ 0.01	0.84 $\pm$ 0.01	087 $\pm$ 003
Gravel	0	0	0	0.04	0.1	0	0	05
Sand	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.4
Loam	0	0	0	0.1	0.2	0.08	0.1	0.1
Clay	0.1	0.1	0.04	0.11	0.1	0.11	0.2	0
Dead leaves	0.2	0.2	0.16	0.09	0	0.11	0	0
Boulder (pre- sence/absence)	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Bank (tree/grass)	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0

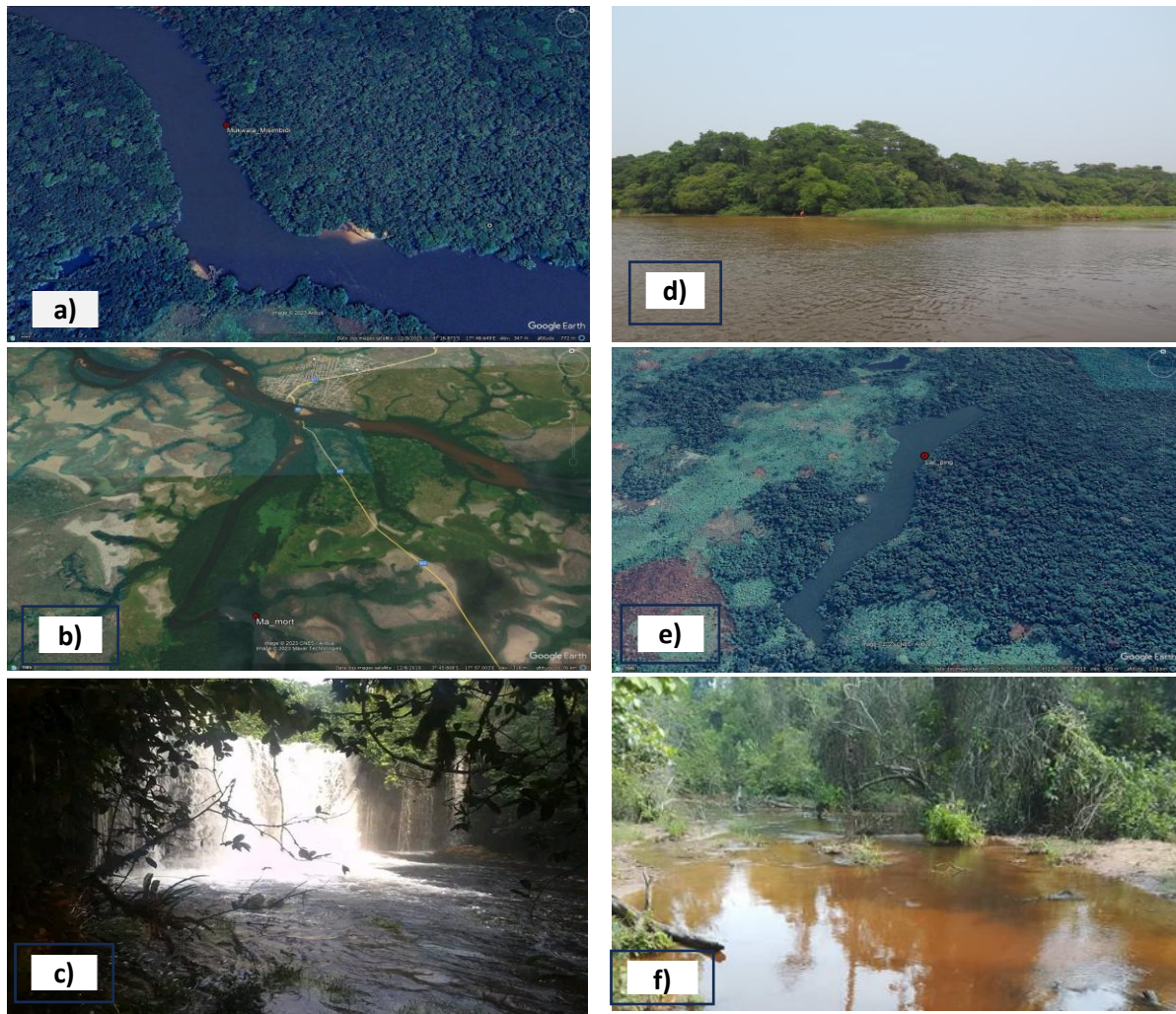


Figure 2. Typological diversity of habitats explored: a) river in dense forest and large swampy areas; b) river near a large urban area where the environment is degraded; c) river upstream and downstream of a waterfall or physical barrier; d) river in meadow-forest; e) lake environment; f) small, shallow river.

Specimen identification

Pre-identification was carried out in the field using the keys proposed by Poll and Gosse (1995). Identifications continued in the biology laboratory of the Mbanza-Ngungu Higher Pedagogical Institute from December 2022 to September 2023. The specimens were removed from formalin two hours before handling and placed in a freshwater tank. Identification was completed using identification cards by species, genus, and family, referring to the work of Boulenger (1909, 1911, and 1915), Poll (1967b and 1971), Paugy (1986), Tshibwabwa and Teugels (1995), Tshibwabwa (1997), Boden et al. (1997), Roberts (2003), Tshibwabwa et al. (2006), and Stiassny et al. (2007), Retzer (2010) and Ferraris et al. (2011). We also used the literature of Ibala (2010); Brooks et al. (2011) as well as that of Mbimbi (2013) to facilitate identifications. The validity of the species names used was checked using FishBase (2023). Fish sizes were taken using two calipers.

All difficult-to-identify individuals were preserved and a piece of right pelvic fin was collected for identification by DNA analysis at the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (Belgium). The collected sample was numbered and stored in a small polyethylene tube filled with 98% ethanol. The tube number corresponded to that of the unidentified specimen (Wamuini, 2010; Louizi, 2019).

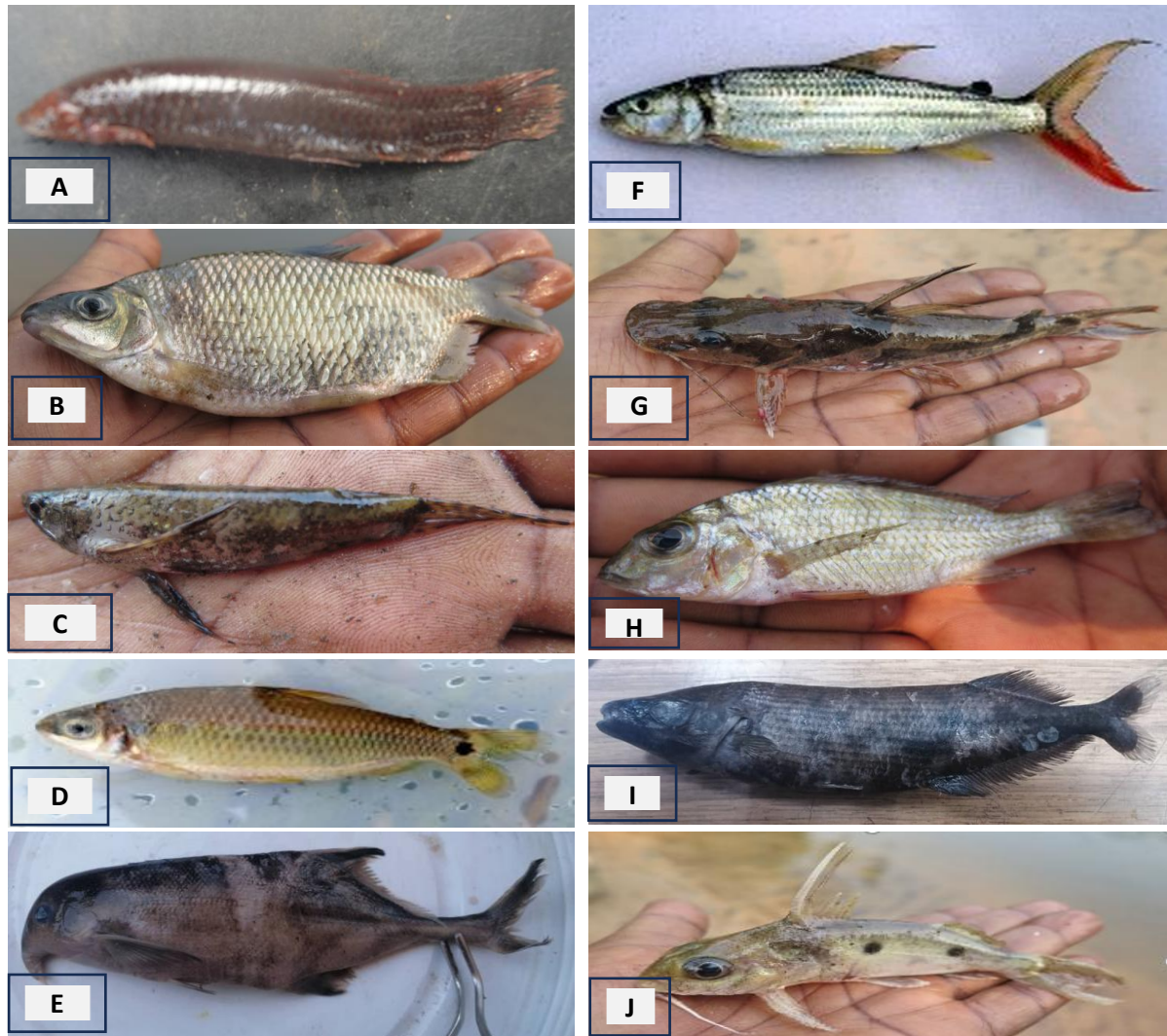


Figure 3. Some lesser-known species in the Inzia river basin: A. *Phractolaemus ansorgii* (Boulenger, 1901) ; B. *Distichodus affinis* (Günther, 1873) ; C. *Pantodon buchholzi* (Peters, 1876) ; D. *Distichodus decemmaculatus* (Pellegrin, 1926) ; E. *Campylomormyrus mirus* (Boulenger, 1898) ; F. *Hydrocynus vittatus* (Castelnau, 1861) ; G. *Chrysichthys ornatus* (Boulenger, 1902); H. *Tylochromis lateralis* (Boulenger, 1898) ; I. *Mormyrops nigricans* (Boulenger, 1899) ; J. *Synodontis congicus* (Poll, 1971).

Data analysis

Using the R.4.4.3 and Past 0.2 software, several diversity indices were calculated to characterize the fish population structure during the first sampling campaign in the Inzia basin:

(i) The relative abundance of a species in an ecosystem is given by the relationship: n_i/N ; n_i : number of individuals of species i and N : total number of individuals harvested (Dajoz, 1996).

(ii) The specific richness (S) of a community is the simplest measure of diversity. It is expressed by the total number of species observed (in absolute value or per unit area or volume);

(iii) Simpson's diversity index represented by 1-D, with maximum diversity represented by the value 1, and minimum diversity by the value 0 (Kathryn Morris et al., 2014). $D = \sum f_i^2$ Where: $f_i = n_i/N$; n_i : number of individuals of the given species; N: total number of individuals;

(iv) The Shannon-Weaver index (H'), which is a measure of diversity that takes into account not only species richness, but also the proportion represented by each species within the community.

$$H' = - \sum_{i=1}^s \left(\frac{n_i}{N} \right) \ln \left(\frac{n_i}{N} \right)$$

Where: (S) is the total number of species present; (n_i) the number of species i in the sample and (N) the total number of species. H' varies between 0 (in the case where the stand consists of a single species) and H' maximum ($H'_{\max} = \log_2 S$) in the case where all species are present with equivalent abundance (Sisa et al., 2018; Ibala, 2010).

(v) JACCARD similarity index, which measures the degree of similarity between stands. Its formula is:

$$J = \frac{N_c}{N_x + N_y + N_c}$$

With N_c : number of taxa common to both stations; N_x and N_y : number of taxa present at stations x and y respectively. The JACCARD similarity index ranges from 0 to 1 (Dajoz, 1996; Ibala, 2010; Sisa et al, 2018).

(vi) Piélou equitability index: The Shannon index is rarely used alone. It is often accompanied by the Piélou equitability index, which measures the distribution of individuals within a species. This more rigorous parameter is very useful for comparing potential dominance between sites, as it is independent of species richness. It reflects the degree of diversity achieved by a stand and is calculated as follows:

$$J = \frac{H}{H_{\max}}$$

The value of Pielou's equitability index (J) therefore varies between 0 and 1, where 0 corresponds to the dominance of one species and 1 to the equi-repartition of individuals between the different species. Where: H corresponds to the Shannon index; $H_{\max}$ corresponds to the value of maximum theoretical diversity ($\log_b S$); S is the species richness (Beisel et al., 2003). The influences of Environmental Variables-Stations-Species were analyzed using Canoco software for Windows 4.5 software, and the Adobe Photoshop 2024 software was used to plot the longitudinal distribution of species in the Inzia basin.

Results

Ichthyofauna diversity defined by orders, families, and species caught

In total, 17 187 fish were caught of which 92.3% ($n = 15\,861$) individuals were captured by static nets, 4.0% ($n = 695$) by hawks, 1.7% ($n = 293$) by hooks, 1.7% (291) by scooped fish, and 0.3% ($n = 47$) found by local fishermen (Table 2). These results showed that 91 fish species identified belonged to 25 families and 12 orders. However, 7 adult specimens were unidentified. The relative abundance (Table 2) of fish families in the Inzia basin was dominated by Mormyridae (13.18%, with $n = 12$ species), followed by Alestidae (12.08%, $n = 11$), Disichodontidae and Mochokidae (8.72%, $n = 8$ each one), and Cichlidae (7.62%; $n = 5$). Other captured families are less well represented. Based on the environmental variables collected, the presence of Mormyridae at the top of the captured fish families was likely due to the availability of lentic water areas rich in dead leaves in most of the habitats studied. In terms of fish resource orders, Siluriformes were in the lead with 27.47% of species, followed by Characiformes (23.07%), Osteoglossiformes (17.58%), Cypriniformes and Cichliformes (7.69% per order).

In terms of species caught, *Synodontis nigriventris* was the most abundant (13.14%), followed by *Rhabdalestes rhodesiensis* (10.11%), *Phenacogrammus interruptus* (9.53%), *Petrocephalus christyi* (8.20%), *Brycinus imberi* (7.29%), *Schilbe marmoratus* (6.58%), *Micralestes humilis* (5.28%), *Enteromius miolepis* (4.64%), *Brachypetersius altus* (2.83%) and *Clypeobarbus congicus* (1.71%). Other species are relatively poorly represented (Table ii).

This abundance was dominated by small species, reflecting the impact of anthropogenic pressure on the fishery resources in the area studied.

Table 2. Species identified by station. A to V were the fished stations.

N°	TAXON	STATIONS																						TOTAL	Relative Abundance
		Inzia river								Luie				Lukula					Kafi		Pechi	Pombu	Ping Lake		
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V		
	CERATODONTIFORMES																								
	Protopteridae (1)																								
01	Protopterus dolloi Boulenger, 1900	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0,029092
	POLYPTERIFORMES																								
	Polypteridae (2)																								
02	Polypterus ornatipinnis Boulenger, 1902	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0,023273
03	Polypterus palmas Ayres, 1850	0	1	4	6	3	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	25	0,145459
	OSTEOGLOSSIFORMES																								
	Pantodontidae (1)																								
04	Pantodon buchholzi Peters, 1876	3	9	32	43	26	4	7	1	0	3	0	1	4	2	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	140	0,814569
	Notopteridae (2)																								
05	Papyrocranus congoensis (Nichols & La Monte, 1932)	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0,017455
06	Xenomystus nigri (Günther, 1868)	3	17	21	32	24	5	7	0	13	1	1	0	1	13	1	7	0	6	0	0	0	16	168	0,0977483
	Mormyridae (12)																								
07	Campylomormyrus mirus (Boulenger, 1898)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,011637
08	Cyphomyrus cf psittacus (Boulenger , 1897)	0	1	6	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0,064002
09	Gnathonemus petersii (Günther, 1862)	4	6	19	21	26	3	5	11	8	0	0	0	0	7	1	0	0	1	0	0	13	11	136	0,791296
10	Marcusenius greshoffii (Schilthuis, 1891)	0	0	0	6	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	21	0,122185
11	Marcusenius fuscus (Pellegrin, 1901)	0	5	42	9	11	0	8	0	29	0	0	1	0	6	3	0	2	0	1	2	4	0	123	0,715657
12	Marcusenius moorii (Günther, 1867)	4	0	16	19	22	0	9	0	11	6	1	0	9	7	7	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	116	0,674929
13	Marcusenius monteiri (Günther,1873)	0	2	0	7	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	30	0,174551
14	Mormyrops nigricans Boulenger, 1899	2	2	5	5	3	3	0	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	27	0,157095
15	Mormyrops sirenoides Boulenger, 1898	4	0	3	2	0	3	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	19	0,110549
16	Mormyrus caballus Boulenger, 1898	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,011637
17	Petrocephalus christyi Boulenger, 1920	156	109	82	421	317	47	22	6	61	11	46	4	11	39	18	3	36	19	2	0	0	0	1410	8,203875
18	Stomatorhinus microps Boulenger, 1898	3	21	24	5	19	0	5	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	83	0,482923
	Arapaimidae (1)																								
19	Heterotis niloticus (Cuvier, 1829)	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	15	0,087275
	CLUPEIFORMES																								
	Dorosomatidae (1)																								
20	Pellonula leonensis Boulenger, 1916	0	9	0	6	4	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	0,168732
	GONORYNCHIFORMES																								
	Phractolaemidae (1)																								
21	Phractolaemus ansorgii Boulenger, 1901	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0,011637
	CYPRINIFORMES																								
	Cyprinidae (5)																								
22	Clypeobarbus congicus (Boulenger, 1899)	16	31	68	72	61	11	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	295	1,716414
23	Clypeobarbus matthesi (Poll & Gosse, 1963)	6	18	0	19	24	6	0	3	0	0	0	0	5	13	4	6	8	1	0	0	0	0	113	0,657474
24	Enteromius chiumbeensis (Pellegrin, 1936)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	38	0	38	0,221097

Calculated biodiversity indexes

Based on the biodiversity index calculations from the ichthyofauna diversity matrix of 22 stations in the study basin, the Shannon index showed high diversity (3.20) at station I (Teba), followed by C (3.04 at Kimbi nsayala), and G (3.01 at Port Ipaki). Regarding the Piélou Index, a species dominance of 0.60 was observed at station P (Mbanzamwanga), 0.67 at D (Misimbidi-Mukwala), 0.71 at E (Dunda), 0.72 at B (Port Macurmbiem) and 0.75 at N (Dondo) (Fig. 4). In terms of Simpson's index, the most abundant species were clearly observed at station I (0.93), G (0.92), and E, B and K (0.91). However, the difference was less between several other stations. Specific richness, on the other hand, was higher at stations D (70), B (66), C (64), E (62), I (49) and N (44), which corroborated with the result of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) derived from the station-species matrix. The Jaccard Similarity Index expressed by the Cluster dendrogram (Fig. 5) revealed 4 groups of fish populations in the Inzia basin. The first was made up of species present at station D, the second included those of two stations, C and E, the third included 17 stations (O, P, U, S, V, L, T, J, M, F, H, G, I, A, Q, K and R). The last one included the species from stations B and N.

Although located downstream of the main river Inzia, which was on average 106.6 m wide, the presence of swamps and the outlets of two other rivers (Lwale in the Mansasayi sector and Ebwi in Kwilu Ntobere), on averaging 10 m wide and 2 m deep, give some sites at Station B characteristics similar to those at Station N (tributary streams, swamps, etc.).

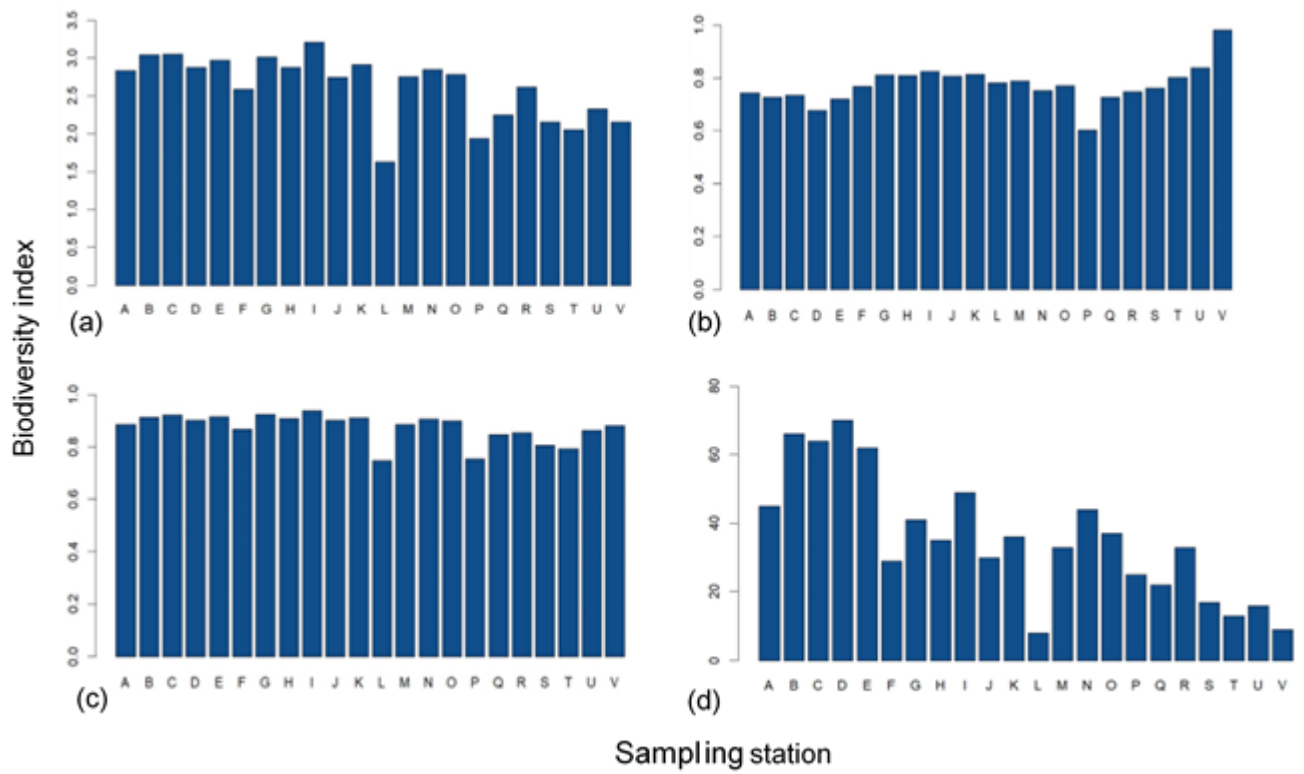


Figure 4. Biodiversity indices calculated for the 22 sampled stations (A to V): (a) Shannon's diversity index, (b) Pielou's equitability index, (c) Simpson's diversity index, and (d) Taxa (S).

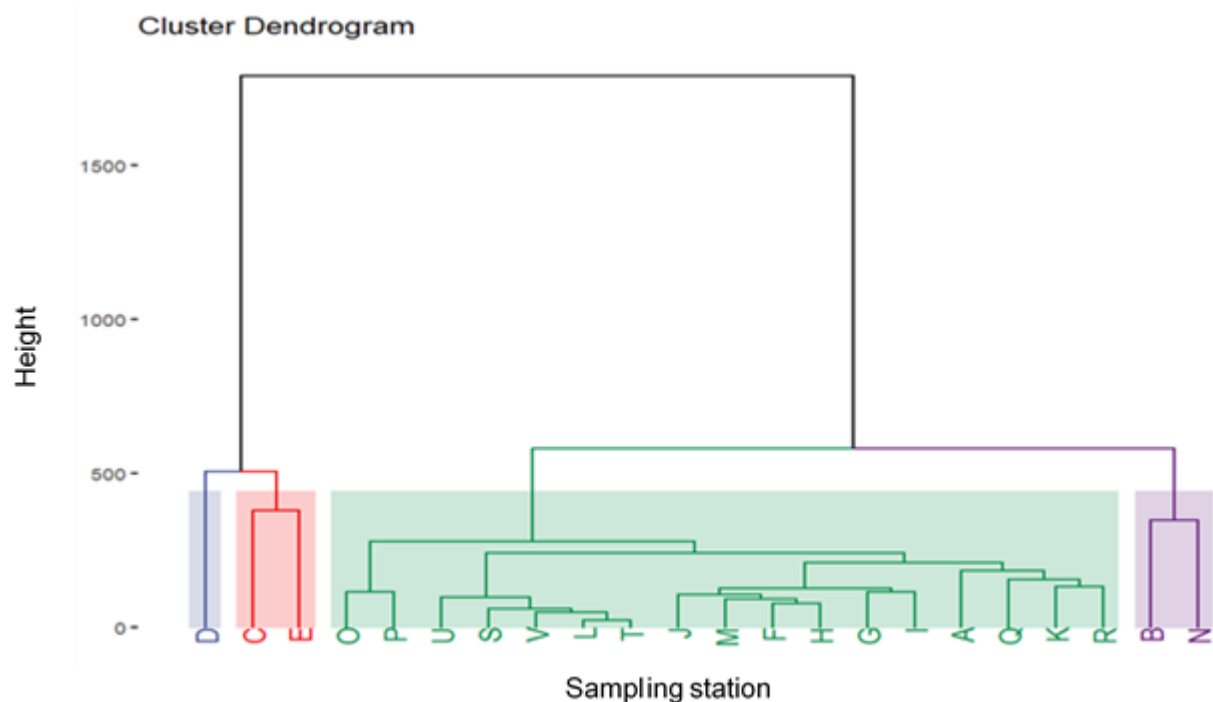


Figure 5. Jaccard Similarity Level between the sampled stations (A to V). The first community in blue is represented by fish from station D, the second in red groups stations C and E, the third in green has 17 stations (O, P, U, S, V, L, T, J, M, F, H, G, I, A, Q, K and R), and the last community in purple) by stations B and N.

Influences of environmental variables on the ichthyofauna distribution

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) derived from the station-species matrix (Fig. 6a) revealed a species similarity of 70.1% on axis 1 in four stations (D, followed by B, E, and N). The species *Hemichromis elongatus*, *Marcusenius monteiri*, *Parachanna insignis*, *Pantodon buchholzi*, *Cyphomyrus psittacus*, *Mormyrops nigricans*, *Synodontis contractus*, *Enteromius miolepis*, *Raiamas christyi*, *Phago boulengeri*, *Eugnathichthys macroterolepis*, *Rubricatichromis stellifer*, *Marcusenius moorii*, *Clypeobarbus congicus*, *Citharinus gibbosus*, *Xenomystus nigri*, *Ctenopoma ocellatum*, *Labeo lineatus*, and *Distichodus decemmaculatus* were more present in the first three stations located in the Inzia river. In contrast, *Synodontis congicus*, *Synodontis vaillanti*, *Oreochromis niloticus*, *Distichodus affinis*, *Brycinus grandisquamis*, *Chrysichthys ornatus*, *Brachypetersius altus*, *Synodontis nigriventris*, *Phenacogrammus interruptus*, *Brycinus imberi*, *Schilbe grenfelli*, *Rhabdalestes rhodesiensis*, *Schilbe marmoratus* and *Micralestes humilis* exerted more influence on the last station of the

Lukula River (Test of significance of first canonical axis: eigenvalue = 0.183, F-ratio = 0.000, P-value = 1.0000).

The PCA from the station-environmental variable matrix (Fig. 6b) showed 84.7% convergence on axis 1 for the same stations. Canopy height, distance from source, percentage of sandy substrate, water temperature, station width, bank constitution, TDS and proportion of dead leaves would explain this convergence, as also revealed by the overall similarity of 71.1% observed in terms of ichthyofauna diversity in these biotopes.

Canonical redundancy analysis (CRA) also confirmed that the main environmental variables influencing up to 70.1% (Fig. 6c) of species distribution at the different stations in the Inzia basin were indeed those mentioned above. Finally, the analysis of significant environmental variables - Species (Fig. 6d) revealed three determining variables for species distribution in the first four stations rich in fish diversity, which included TDS, sandy substrate and canopy height. Canonical redundancy analysis (CRA) also confirmed that the main environmental variables influencing up to 70.1% (Fig. 6c) of species distribution at the different stations in the Inzia basin were indeed those mentioned above. Finally, the analysis of significant environmental variables - Species (Fig. 6d) revealed three determining variables for species distribution in the first four stations rich in fish diversity, which included TDS, sandy substrate and canopy height.

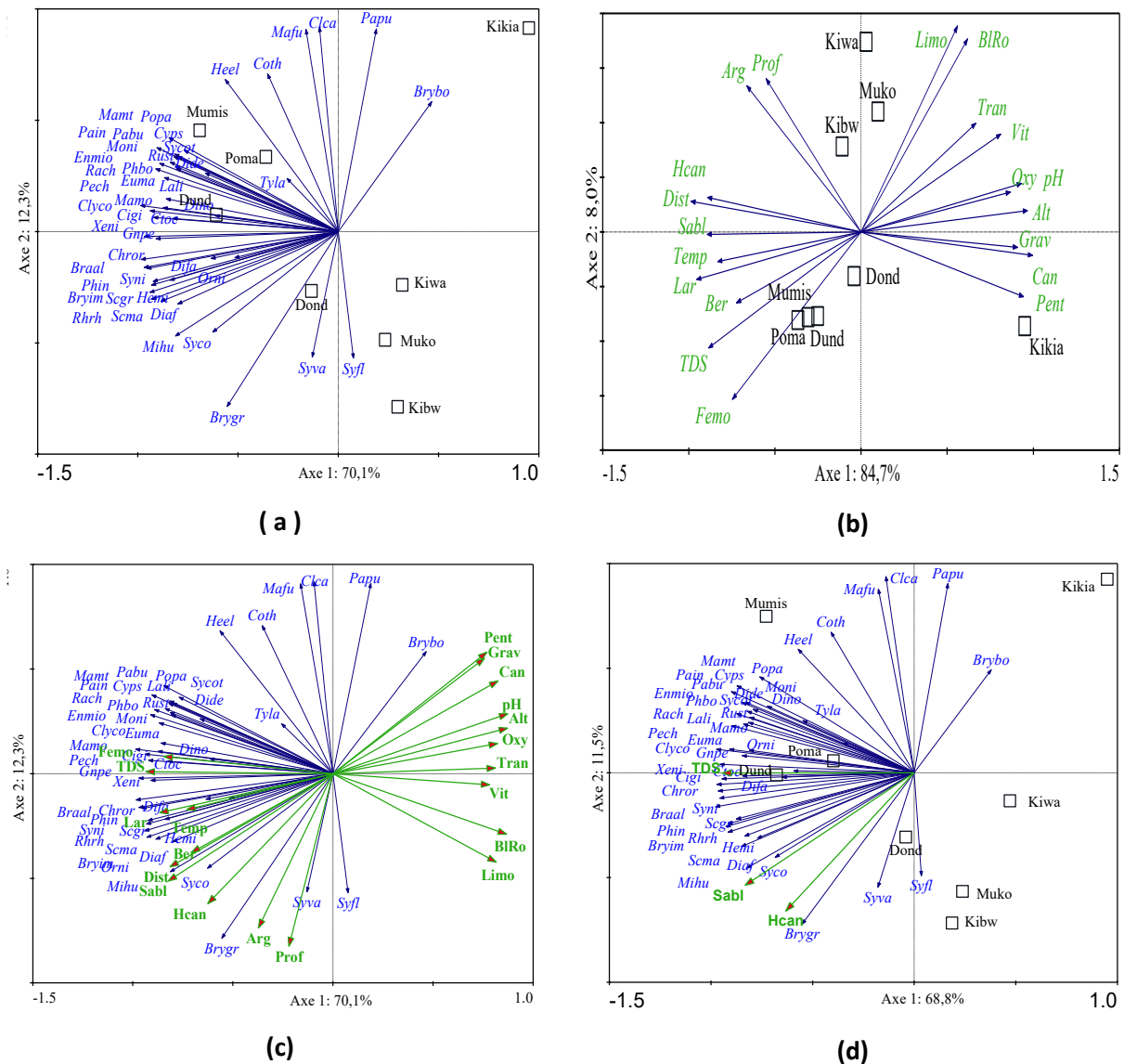


Figure 6. Analysis of the influence of environmental variables on the species distribution within the Inzia basin: (a) Principal Component Analysis (PCA) Stations - Species; (b) PCA Stations - Environmental variables; (c) Canonical Redundancy Analysis (RCA) Environmental variables - Species; (d) RCA Significant environmental variables – Species. Stations were Poma (Port Macurmbien - B), Mumis (Misimbidi - D), Dund (Dunda - E), Kibw (Kibwila - T), Kiwa (Kiwawa - J), Dond (Dondo - N), Muko (Mukomo - O) and Kikia (Pechi Kikiadi - T); Species were: Popa (*Polypterus palmas*), Pabu (*Pantodon buchholzi*), Xeni (*Xenomystus nigri*), Cyps (*Cyphomyrus psittacus*), Gnpe (*Gnathonemus petersii*), Mafu (*Marcusenius fuscus*), Mamo (*Marcusenius moorii*), Mamt (*Marcusenius monteiri*), Moni (*Mormyrops nigricans*), Pech (*Petrocephalus christyi*), Clyco (*Clypeobarbus congicus*), Enmio (*Enteromius miolepis*), Lali (*Labeo lineatus*), Rach. (*Raiamas christyi*), Diaf. (*Distichodus affinis*), Dide. (*Distichodus decemmaculatus*), Difa (*Distichodus fasciolatus*), Dino (*Distichodus notospilus*), Euma (*Eugnathichthys macroterolepis*), Phbo (*Phago boulengeri*), Cigi (*Citharinus gibbosus*), Braal. (*Brachypetersius altus*), Bryim. (*Brycinus imberi*), Brygr. (*Brycinus grandisquamis*), Brybo. (*Bryconaethiops boulengeri*), Mihu. (*Micralestes humilis*), Phin. (*Phenacogrammus interruptus*), Rhrh. (*Rhabdalestes rhodesiensis*), Hemi. (*Hepsetus microlepis*), Syco. (*Synodontis congicus*), Sycot. (*Synodontis contractus*), Syfl. (*Synodontis flavitaeniatus*), Syni. (*Synodontis nigriventris*), Syva. (*Synodontis vaillanti*), Scgr. (*Schilbe grenfelli*), Scma. (*Schilbe marmoratus*), Chror. (*Chrysichthys ornatus*), Clca. (*Clarias camerunensis*), Papu.

Parauchenoglanis punctatus), Coth. (*Coptodon tholloni*), Heel. (*Hemichromis elongatus*), Orni. (*Oreochromis niloticus*), Rust. (*Rubricatochromis stellifer*), Tyla. (*Tylochromis lateralis*), Ctoc. (*Ctenopoma ocellatum*, and Pain. (*Parachanna insignis*); Environmental variables were: Lar. (Width, in m), Prof (Depth, m), Dist. (Distance from source, Km), Alt (Elevation, m), Pent. (Slope, m/Km), Hcan. (Canopy height, m), Can. (Canopy cover, %), Temp. (water temperature, °C), Oxy. (Oxygen, mg/l), pH, Vit. (Water speed, m/s), TDS. (Dissolved Subsistancy Rate, ppm), Tran. (Transparency, m). Substratum: Grav. (Gravel), Sabl. (Sand), Limo. (Loam), Arg. (Clay), Femo. (Dead leaves), BlRo. (Boulder, presence/absence) and Ber. (Bank, tree/grass) (in relative abundance). (Percentages of species, environmental variables and station representation on the first two axes).

Discussion

Thanks to systematic sampling of fish resources and environmental variable study performed in 8 different rivers, using the analysis of biodiversity indices and environmental variables, we were able to assess fish biodiversity and determine the environmental variables influencing species dispersal. This study significantly contributed to the first knowledge's of the ichthyofauna diversity of the Inzia watershed, as well as the parameters influencing fish distribution in the different habitats of the studied environment.

In a single fish inventory carried out in 2022, our study identified in the Inzia basin an ichthyofauna composed of 91 species belonging to 57 genera, 25 families and 12 orders. In other tropical aquatic ecosystems in the DRC, particularly in the Inkisi River, Wamuini et al. (2010) observed and identified in two sampling campaigns 61 species grouped into 37 genera belonging to 15 families.

Katemo et al. (2023) studied the fish diversity in the Upemba National Park (PNU) in the DRC, and counted 248 species, 78 genera belonging to 26 families and 15 orders, during two fish inventory campaigns. Ekyamba et al. (2023) observed an ichthyofauna composed of 129 species, 54 genera belonging to 20 families and 8 orders, in Lomami National Park (LNP) in the DRC. Mbimbi and Stiassny (2011) studied the fish diversity of the Kwilu River, the outlet of the Inzia, and identified 113 species, 45 genera grouped within 21 families. Monsembula et al. (2013) reported after two fish inventory campaigns a ichthyofauna diversity in the N'sele River located in the Malebo Pool in the DRC a ichthyofauna diversity composed of 148 species, 64 genera belonging to 27 families.

The number of species, genera, families and orders observed varying between tropical aquatic ecosystems in the DRC would be attributed to the difference in the habitats studied, the types and selectivity of capture gear and the fishing season. The results of our study were carried out in a dry season using gear and capture methods that would be selective. This could mean that the number of fish and species could be higher than the reported values. It should also be noted

that the Inzia basin does not have protected areas like in the PNU and PNL parks, and is therefore the subject of intense human activities.

Our results also show that some species are more present at certain stations than at others, and that TDS, sandy substrate and canopy height are the determining environmental variables in the distribution of these fish species in the Inzia River and its tributaries. Furthermore, Wamuini et al. (2010) mentioned above, revealed that species distribution varied from station to station, and that grassy banks, the presence of large boulders, station width and the presence of plant debris seemed to influence species distribution in the study environment. These results are similar to our own, the slightest differences being linked to the choice of ecological stations, which in our environment are essentially located in forested areas, and above all, Inzia superior was not sampled.

Ward et al. (1999) have shown that many fish species, although not highly migratory, move between different units of the hydrosystem, and occupy different habitats at different stages of their life cycle. The establishment and development of fish populations and populations in large rivers are conditioned by the diversity of environments offered by the hydrosystem and, above all, by the accessibility of these environments to fish. This is consistent with the results of our research, which found 4 groups of fish populations populating the environment under study: (i) species present at station D, (ii) those at stations C and E, (iii) species at stations O, P, U, S, V, L, T, J, M, F, H, G, I, A, Q, K and R; and (iv) those at stations B and N. The presence of the first stand (station D) can be explained by the location of its habitat in the least disturbed forest environment, close to large marshy areas. The second is due to habitats located in transition zones between undisturbed and disturbed forest environments, at the junction of large rivers (Inzia-Luie, Inzia-Lukula). The particularity of the last locality (B, N) may be linked to certain habitat similarities, associated with anthropogenic pressure at B (influence of an active port as well as several fishing camps in the town of Bagata and surrounding villages). According to our knowledge of the terrain, the presence of station N near to B is due to the stagnant arms of the river, as well as the presence of swamps located from the Makala tributary up to its confluence with the Lukula on the left bank, and those located towards Kikongo on the right bank, which give limnophilic species the possibility of proliferating easily alongside the rheophilic species of the main watercourse.

The concept of the river continuum is an important milestone in river ecology, as it allows a comprehensive assessment of the structure and function of lotic ecosystems. This theory, which links physical and geomorphological attributes of streams to biodiversity patterns, functional traits and metabolic dynamics, describes downstream and upstream gradients in community

composition and ecosystem processes (Doretto et al., 2020). Along the Inzia basin (Fig. 7), the middle course contains 76 species, 53 of which are perceptible at altitudes ranging from 363 to 449 m and at an interval of 138 to 190 Km as the crow flies from the basin's confluence with the Kwilu River. Sixteen species are present at altitudes between 541 and 662 m and between 190 and 220 Km from the Inzia River outlet, beyond the falls (Lipens and Pechi).

This reduction in the number of species upstream of the waterfalls also reflects the influence of physical barriers on fish distribution in our studied environment, which could favour genetic differentiation due to altitude. This would be amplified by the presence of different barriers that reduce or block the upstream dispersal of fish species (Boizard, 2008; Fanny Arnaud, 2012; Piégay et al., 2022).

According to Katemo et al. (2023), the role of waterfalls and rapids as barriers to upstream fish dispersal and isolation of fish has already been observed in the DRC in the Luanza River basin (a left-bank sub-tributary of the Middle Luapula River in the Upper Congo basin). The Kundelungu Plateau (1310-1690 m altitude) and the mountainous areas (995-1300 m altitude) are endemic zones, colonized by a poor ichthyofauna composed of torrential species. The number of species increases considerably in the lowlands (975-995 m altitude). In these lands, the highland ichthyofauna is replaced by that characteristic of the lowland ichthyofauna.

Dispersal barriers are therefore a component of connectivity that may be a more important determinant of fish species dispersal than the distance by waterway between two rivers (Poissant et al., 2005). Their influence on species dispersal and migration is reflected both in the specific composition of communities and the genetic structure of populations. The presence of certain fish species in watercourses is more dependent on the presence or absence of barriers than on the presence of favourable habitat (Spens et al. 2007).

Dispersal barriers will generally not prevent the downstream dispersal of individuals (Adams et al. 2001), but they will isolate upstream populations from the influx of migrants from the network downstream of the barriers (Knaepkens et al., 2004; Crispo et al., 2006). Gene flow will become unidirectional, from upstream to downstream. This isolation will lead to greater differentiation of populations upstream of impassable barriers, and often to a reduction in their genetic diversity compared with other populations in the river system (Taylor et al., 2003; Habicht et al., 2004; Knaepkens et al., 2004; Poissant et al., 2005). The role of barriers is therefore crucial in the study of fish species dispersal.

The results of this research show, in particular, that of the 89 species identified in Inzia inferior, only 53 are present in the three stations (F, J, S) located along National Route 1. According to Lévêque and Paugy (2006a), the consequences of human activities, amplified today by population growth and ever-increasing pressure on natural resources, are endangering fish fauna

almost everywhere in the world. Africa, which has long been spared, is now suffering these impacts. These comments corroborate with our results, which show the anthropogenic pressure linked to the significant human traffic along this route N°1 negatively impacted on the diversity of ichthyofauna in the Inzia basin.

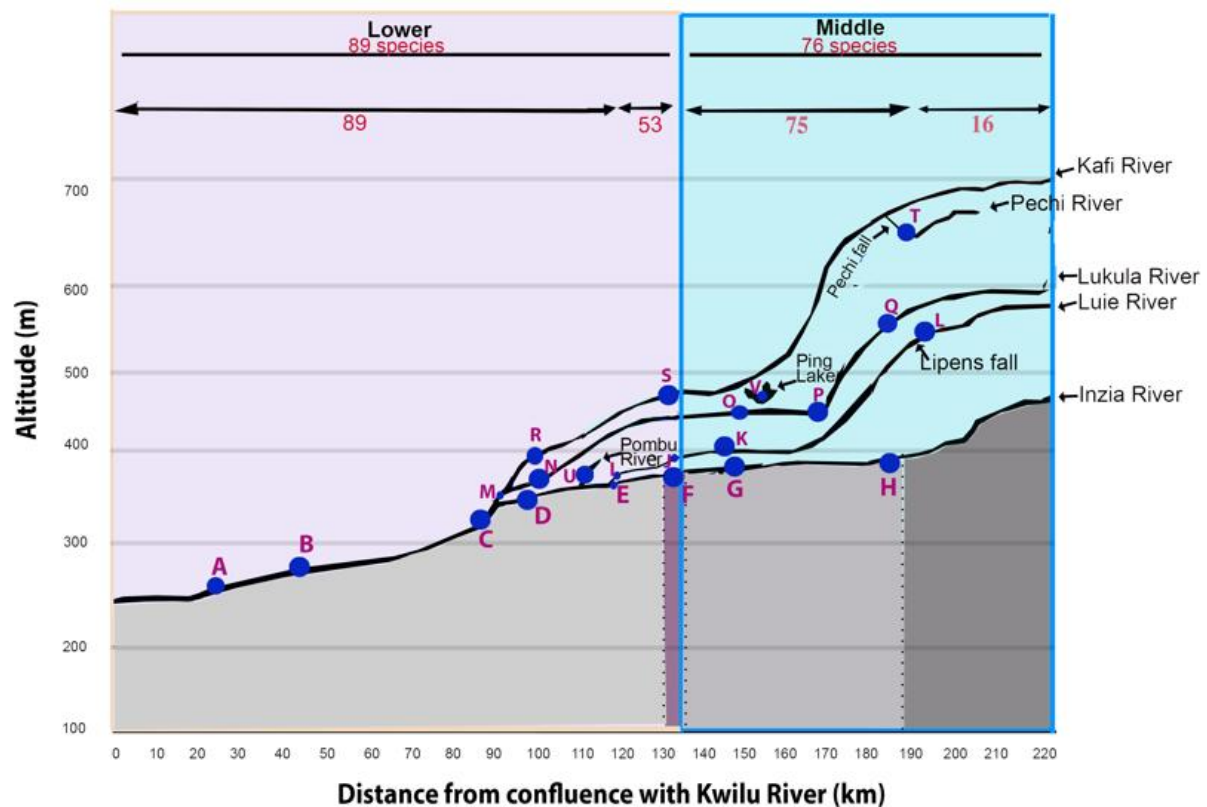


Figure 7. Longitudinal distribution of species in the Inza basin according to distance from the Inza mouth and altitude. Sampling stations are A to V.

Conclusion

The aim of this study, which contributes to improving our knowledge of fish in the Inzia basin in the Middle Congo, was to assess the biodiversity of the ichthyofauna, the relative abundance of species and the environmental variables that influence of fish dispersal in this little-studied environment. Given that the part of the basin sampled is essentially located in a forest environment, we recorded an abundance of Mormyridae (13.18%), followed by Alestidae (12.02%), Mochokidae (8.79%) and Claridae (5.49%).

For species expected to have larger populations, we observed that the specimens were generally small. Similar to the presence of the Alestidae in this group, a family dominated by small-bodied species would indirectly reflect the anthropogenic pressure (Laë et al., 2004) to which the local fish resources are subject.

regarding environmental variables, although we observed a decrease in the number of species in the field at stations where the water current was relatively high and the substrate dominated by boulders, data analysis showed that these variables were not more decisive in the distribution of species in the studied environment (see Fig. 4d).

Our results confirm the abundant biodiversity of fish species in tropical ecosystems, regardless of anthropogenic pressure on fishery resources. Seven individuals remained unidentified and will be identified by DNA analysis in specialized laboratories in Belgium. These unidentified individuals are likely to be new species. It would be interesting to conduct regular fish monitoring in our study area in the future, combining the effect of seasonal capture and habitat exploitation behavior. A mapping of spawning areas would be important to establish for the implementation of species restoration and conservation measures through the delimitation of species protection zones and where fishing would be prohibited in order to promote sustainable management of ichthyofauna in the Inzia basin.

Acknowledgements

We would firstly like to thank the European Union for the funding implemented by the European Alliance in the Field of Agricultural Knowledge for Development, European Economic Interest Grouping (AGRINATURA- EEIG) and the Regional Post-Graduate School of Integrated Management of Tropical Forests and Territories (ERAIFT), through the project « Capacity building for biodiversity practitioners, scientists and policy makers for the sustainable management of protected areas and forest ecosystems in Africa ». We would also like to thank the members of the Aquatic Resources Management and Aquaculture Unit, University of Liège, as well as the administrative and academic staff of ERAIFT, for facilitating and supervising this study. Our thanks also go to Mr Yanick Kulungu Akedio, and to assistants Cowhain Manana, Idriss Mungongo, and Jerith Kikay for their unfailing support during data collection in the field.

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