

Notes on the members of the genus *Cochliodon* (Siluriformes: Loricariidae) from Venezuela

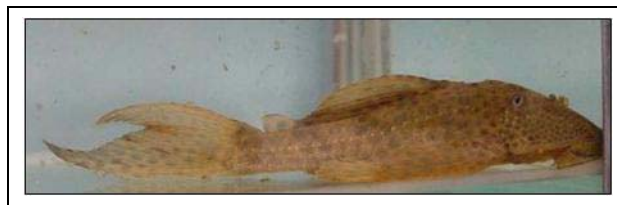
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In a 1984 study, Craig Lilystrom reviewed the species of the genus *Cochliodon* recorded from Venezuela. Lilystrom determined that *C. cochliodon* (Kner, 1854) is not present in Venezuela and that *C. pospisili* Schultz, 1944 is a junior synonym of *C. hondae* (Regan, 1912). In the paper, the author also described the new species *C. taphorni* from the Essequibo drainage. This leaves Venezuela with three described species: *C. hondae* from the Maracaibo basin, *C. plecostomoides* from the Lake Valencia, Orinoco and Rio Tuy drainages and the new species *C. taphorni*.



Cochliodon plecostomoides Rio Tinaco, Cojedes State

Distinguishing *Cochliodon* from *Hypostomus* can be very difficult. In fact, Armbruster has suggested that *Cochliodon*, *Hypostomus*, *Isorineloricaria*, and *Aphanotoulus* may all be inseparable. Traditionally, *Cochliodon* is distinguished by its fewer teeth (less than 20 on each jaw), which are spoon shaped. *Hemiancistrus* can also be confused with *Cochliodon*, but they have much finer teeth.



Hypostomus plecostomus Rio Guarico, Guarico State

Unfortunately, most photographs in the aquarium literature do not include close ups of the pictured loricariids dentition. Colour patterns are also rarely helpful in differentiating *Cochliodon* species from each other or other genera. While collecting in the Rio Tinaco Cojedes State, Venezuela, I collected several *Cochliodon* and threw them back because I thought they were just common *Hypostomus plecostomus*. Luckily, I retained one specimen of four inches from the collecting trip. I placed it in a tank with a four inch *Hypostomus plecostomus* from the Rio Guarico and then, with the fish side by side, I was easily able to determine that the Rio Tinaco loricariid was in fact *Cochliodon plecostomoides*.

All Venezuelan *Cochliodon* species are an overall brown colour with darker spots. The spots are smaller in diameter from the dorsal fin base forward to the snout. The overall brown coloration of the body is very variable depending on

the substrate color, water clarity, and the fish's mood. In *C. taphorni*, the lower caudal lobe is noticeably darker than the upper. Unstressed and over a neutral brown substrate, *C. hondae* shows a base body colour of yellow-brown while *C. plecostomoides* is a darker red-brown. By comparison, *H. plecostomus* in the same setting is a gray-brown with light vertical stripes below the dorsal fin, before the adipose fin, and at the caudal peduncle. As with *H. plecostomus*, all three Venezuelan *Cochliodon* have 1, 7 dorsal rays.



Juvenile *H. plecostomus*, Rio Zuata, Miranda Sta

As aquarium residents, *Cochliodon* are great choices. They are less aggressive than most *Hypostomus* and show better deportment since, for some strange reason, they nearly always hold their dorsal fin fully erect. Provide lots of driftwood and a varied diet consisting of fresh vegetables, algae wafers, and occasional frozen meaty foods (e.g. bloodworms and brineshrimp). In closing, I would like to thank Lee Finley for pointing out and providing Lilystrom's paper as well as Norbert Flaugger who was my guide and companion while collecting *Cochliodon* in the Rio Tinaco.

***Cochliodon* species recorded from Venezuela**

C. taphorni Lilystrom, 1984

Range: Rio Cuyuni, Essequibo drainage, Bolivar State

C. hondae (Regan, 1912)

Range/Habitat: Piedmont of the Lake Maracaibo basin where it is normally found amongst submerged wood.

C. plecostomoides Eigenmann, 1922

Range/Habitat: Piedmont and Llanos of the Orinoco drainage, especially in the states of Cojedes, Portuguesa, Barinas, and Apure. Also found in the Lake Valencia drainage and the Rio Tuy system. Lilystrom commented 15 years ago that this species may not exist any longer in these last two drainages due to their high levels of pollution. Despite intensive collecting in the Rio Tuy system, I have yet to encounter this species there.

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