

## ***Polypterus mokelebembe*, a new species of bichir from the central Congo River basin (Actinopterygii: Cladistia: Polypteridae)**

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### **Abstract**

*Polypterus mokelebembe* sp. n. is described from the central Congo River basin. It is distinguished from all other *Polypterus* species except *P. retropinnis*, *P. teugelsi* and *P. palmas palmas* by its high predorsal scale count (32–37 vs. 11–28). It differs from *P. teugelsi* by having 57–60 lateral line scales (vs. 63–65), from *P. palmas palmas* by a single large black blotch on the pectoral-fin base (vs. numerous small spots on the posterior part of the base), and from *P. retropinnis* by having a wider first dorsal-fin spine (6.4–8.1 vs. 4.6–6.1 % of HL), a smaller internostril distance (11.6–13.7 vs 14.3–18.0 % of HL), and fewer pectoral-fin rays (23–29 vs. 30–34). Inasmuch as the type series (comprising three specimens) of *Polypterus retropinnis* Vaillant, 1899 is of mixed composition, and includes two specimens of *P. mokelebembe*, a lectotype is designated for *P. retropinnis* and a rediagnosis for that species is provided.

**Key words:** *Polypteridae*, new species, Congo basin

### **Introduction**

Taxonomic research on recent Polypteridae in the last few decades has been limited to a revision of the *Polypterus palmas* subspecies-complex (Gosse, 1988; Hanssens et al., 1995) and the very recent description of *Polypterus teugelsi* from the upper Cross River drainage in Cameroon by Britz (2004). The last author concluded that “The discovery of the unusual *P. teugelsi* exemplifies our incomplete taxonomic knowledge of polypterids, and highlights the need for a thorough systematic revision of the genus, which will, I believe, yield additional undescribed species in this interesting group of fishes”. This conclusion is supported by the diversity of *Polypterus* phenotypes encountered in commercial aquarium imports (Schäfer, 2004). Inspection of hundreds of *Polypterus*