

Synodontis ngouniensis, new species (Siluriformes: Mochokidae) from the Ngounié and Nyanga basins, Gabon and Republic of Congo

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Synodontis ngouniensis, new species, is described. It is endemic to the Ngounié River (Ogooué River basin) and the Nyanga River basin. It is distinguished from all other *Synodontis* species of the Lower Guinea Ichthyofaunal Province by: a dorsal spine with a smooth anterior margin except for the presence of 1-4 feeble serrations on the distal part; a maxillary barbel with a smooth membrane, which is proximally at least as broad as the barbel thread and situated on the posterior basal two third of the barbel; 12-19 mandibular teeth; 10-13 gill rakers on the ceratobranchial of the first branchial arch; a triangular humeral process, and a striking colour pattern of black overall background colour with irregular whitish lines and dots.

Une nouvelle espèce, *Synodontis ngouniensis*, est décrite. Elle est endémique de la rivière Ngounié (bassin de l'Ogooué) et du bassin de la Nyanga. La nouvelle espèce est distinguée des autres espèces de *Synodontis* de la province ichtyologique de la Basse Guinée par: une épine dorsale à bord antérieur lisse à l'exception de 1-4 faibles serrations sur la partie distale; un barbillon maxillaire avec une membrane lisse proximale au moins aussi large que le barbillon lui-même et située sur les deux tiers basaux postérieurs du barbillon; 12-19 dents mandibulaires, 10-13 branchiospines sur le cératobranchial du premier arc branchial; un processus huméral triangulaire, un patron de coloration contrasté, à fond noir marqué de lignes et points blanchâtres.

Introduction

The genus *Synodontis*, also known as upside-down catfishes or squeakers, is a widespread African genus. With approximately 120 valid species, *Synodontis* is one of the largest African freshwater fish genera (Gosse, 1986; Paugy, 1987; Skelton &

White, 1990; Seegers, 1996; De Vos, 2001; Ferraris, 2007; Friel & Sullivan, 2008). The genus is diagnosed by the presence of a strong bony cranium, scaleless skin without protrusions, branched mandibular barbels, bony dorsal and pectoral spines which can be locked and a well-developed adipose fin (Poll, 1971).

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Fifteen *Synodontis* species are known from the Lower Guinea Ichthyofaunal Province (Fermon et al., 2007; Friel & Sullivan, 2008), i.e. the coastal river basins from the Cross River basin (Cameroon/Nigeria) to the Shiloango River basin (Cabinda, Angola) (Roberts, 1975): *S. acanthoperca*, *S. albolineata*, *S. batesii*, *S. haugi*, *S. marmorata*, *S. nigrita*, *S. obesus*, *S. polyodon*, *S. rebeli*, *S. robbianus*, *S. schall*, *S. steindachneri*, *S. tessmanni*, *S. violacea* and *S. woleuensis*. For details on their distribution see Fermon et al. (2007). Six species are reported from the Ogooué River basin: *S. acanthoperca* known from the Upper Ogooué and Ngounié River basins; *S. albolineata* known only from the Ivindo and Ntem River basins; *S. batesii* known to occur in the entire Ogooué River basin and most other river basins of Gabon; *S. haugi* known from the Lower Ogooué River basin; *S. polyodon* known from the entire Ogooué River basin; and *S. tessmanni* reported from the Ivindo and Ntem River basins. The presence of *S. obesus* in Gabon is questionable and possibly erroneous (Friel & Vigliotta, 2006). At present only a single species (*S. batesii*) is known from the Nyanga River basin (Republic of Congo).

While studying the collections from Gabon and the Republic of Congo at the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale (MRAC) it became apparent that some *Synodontis* specimens from the Ngounié River basin, the major southern tributary of the Ogooué River, and a single specimen from the Nyanga River basin could not be attributed to one of the fifteen species presently known from the Lower Guinea Ichthyofaunal Province. The description of this new species is given below.

Materials and methods

Twenty-eight measurements were taken to the nearest 0.1 mm, on the left side of the specimen (unless damaged), with a needle-point dial calipers and following the method of Skelton & White (1990). Three measurements follow Poll (1971): body depth, humeral process height, and postorbital length. The latter with the following modification: taken from the posterior end of the eye (orbit) to the posterior margin of the post-temporal bone.

Eight meristic characters were also taken on each specimen: number of dorsal-fin rays; number of pectoral-fin rays; number of pelvic-fin rays; number of anal-fin rays; number of mandibular

teeth; number of primary maxillary teeth; total number of gill rakers on first branchial arch; and number of gill rakers on ceratobranchial of first branchial arch, the one at the angle not included.

When possible, specimens attributed to the new species were sexed by external examination. Females have a large urogenital opening surrounded by soft swollen tissue and posteriorly terminating in a small urogenital papilla whereas males have a large pointed urogenital papilla.

The distribution map was made with MapInfo (MapInfo Professional, Version 4.0) and ArcGIS 9. Institutional abbreviations follow Leviton et al. (1985). All locality data have been translated in English.

Synodontis ngouniensis, new species (Fig. 1)

Synodontis sp.: Fermon et al., 2007: 749-750, fig. 24.37

Holotype. MRAC 99-90-P-1989, male, 119.3 mm SL; Gabon: Ngounié-Ogooué Basin: Ngounié River at Nzoundou, 2°17'15"S 11°28'55"E; Sullivan, Beck & Obame, 8 Sep 1998.

Paratypes. CU 93996 (former MRAC 99-90-P-1988), 1 female, 136.2 mm SL; MRAC 99-90-P-1986-1987, 1 male, 109.0 mm SL and 1 female, 127.0 mm SL; collected with holotype. – CU 93997 (former MRAC 99-90-P-1990), 1 male, 108.5 mm SL; Gabon: Ngounié-Ogooué Basin: Ngounié River at Nzoundou, 2°17'15"S 11°28'55"E; Sullivan, Beck & Obame, 9 Sep 1998. – MNHN 2008-0001 (former MRAC A2-06-P-2609-2610), 1 unsexed, 90.0 mm SL; MNHN 2008-0002 (former MRAC A2-06-P-2609-2610), 1 male, 104.0 mm SL; Gabon: Ngounié-Ogooué Basin (Nyanga Basin: in error): Dola River, 2°24'S 11°22'E; Lavoué, 4 Jul 2001. – MRAC 99-55-P-1360, 1 male, 130.0 mm SL. MRAC 99-55-P-1361, 1 male, 116.0 mm SL; Gabon: Doubou River at Mimongo between Mouila and Fougamou, ±1°47'00"S 10°53'00"E; Kamdem Toham, 1 Nov 1998. – MRAC 99-55-P-1362-1364, 1 male, 115.0 mm SL and 2 females, 117.0-147.0 mm SL; MRAC 99-55-P-1365, 1 female, 124.0 mm SL; Gabon: Ngounié basin: River situated beyond village Fèra, ±2°18'00"S 11°19'00"E; Kamdem Toham, 29 Sep 1998. – MRAC 99-55-P-1366-1367, 2 males, 79.5-80.0 mm SL; Gabon: Douafou (Ouafou) River at Nangha, ±2°10'00"S

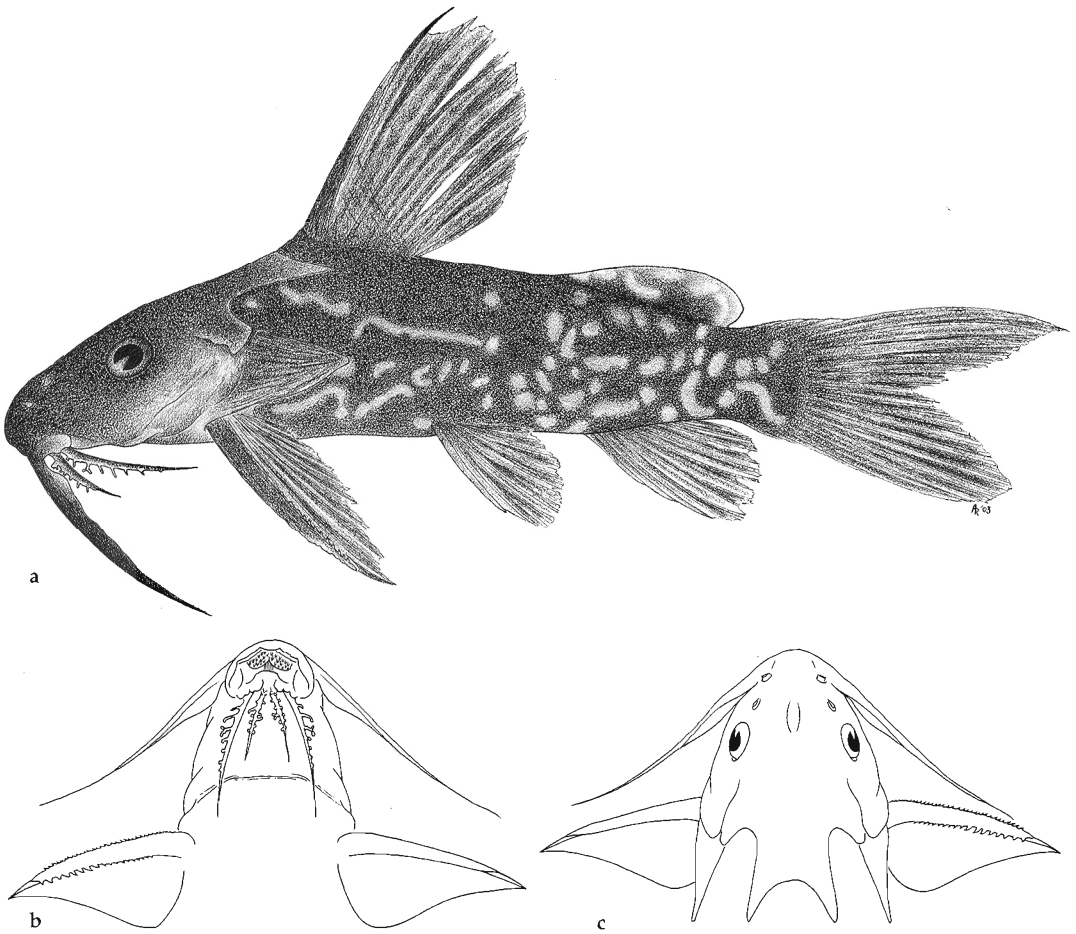


Fig. 1. *Synodontis ngouniensis*, MRAC 99-90-P-1989, holotype, 119.3 mm SL; Gabon: Ogooué basin: Ngounié River (after Fermon et al., 2007). a, lateral view; b, ventral view of head; and c, dorsal view of head.

11°13'00"E; Kamdem Toham, 29 Sep 1998. – MRAC 99-90-P-1982-1983, 2 males, 121.0-130.0 mm SL; Gabon: Ngounié-Ogooué Basin: Ngounié River at bridge, ± 6 km W. of Lébamba, road Lébamba-Ndendé, 2°12'32"S 11°24'45"E; Sullivan, Kamdem Toham & Mvé, 30 Aug 1998. – MRAC 99-90-P-1985, 1 male, 141.0 mm SL; Gabon: Ngounié-Ogooué basin: Ngounié River at Issinga, 2°20'S 11°29'E; Sullivan, Beck & Obame, 6 Sep 1998. – MRAC A1-88-P-2236-2237, 1 male, 93.0 mm SL and 1 female, 115.0 mm SL; Gabon: Dola River at Ndendé, 2°24'S 11°22'E; Mamonekene, 4 Jul 2001.

Additional material (non types). MRAC A7-31-P-0014, 1 female, 132.5 mm SL; Republic of Congo: Ngongo River at Ngongo, just upstream of bridge, 2°39.75'S

11°36.07'E; Ibala Zamba & Vreven, 2 Sep 2007 (DNA sample: tag 668). – MRAC A7-31-P-0015, 1 unsexed, 121.7 mm SL, Republic of Congo: River Nyanga at Nyanga, at bridge, 2°54.72'S 11°53.60'E; Ibala Zamba & Vreven, 30 Aug 2007 (DNA sample: tag 597). – MRAC A7-31-P0016-0018, 3 males, 69.9-94.8 mm SL, Republic of Congo: River Ngongo at Ngongo, just downstream of bridge, 2°39'75"S 11°36'07"E; Ibala Zamba & Vreven, 02 Sep 2007 (DNA sample: tags 669-770).

Diagnosis. *Synodontis ngouniensis* is distinguished from all other species of *Synodontis* of the Lower Guinea Ichthyofaunal Province by the following unique combination of characters: 1-4 feebly developed serrations, distally placed on anterior part of the dorsal spine (vs. entirely well serrated in *S. albolineata*, *S. batesii* and *S. woleuensis*); 12-19 mandibular teeth (vs. 23 or more in *S. haugi*,

S. nigrita, *S. polyodon*, *S. robbianus*, *S. steindachneri*, and *S. violacea*); a broad membrane, i.e. proximally at least as broad as barbel thread, on the proximal two third of the maxillary barbel (vs. no or only very weakly developed in *S. acanthoperca*, *S. marmorata* and *S. schall*); and a striking

colour pattern, characterised by a black background with whitish irregularly shaped lines and dots (vs. a lighter brown background with small or bigger dark brown dots in *S. obesus* and *S. rebeli*; or a uniformly coloured body sometimes with a faint white lateral line and in addition most

Table 1. Morphometrics and meristics for holotype and 19 paratypes of *Synodontis ngouniensis*.

| Morphometrics | holotype | holotype and paratypes | | | | |
|--|----------|------------------------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| | | N | min | max | mean | SD |
| Total length (mm) | 161.5 | 20 | 109.5 | 190.3 | 152.0 | 22.9 |
| Standard length (mm) | 119.3 | 20 | 79.6 | 146.8 | 115.2 | 18.8 |
| Percent of standard length | | | | | | |
| Body depth | 24.0 | 20 | 18.9 | 27.0 | 22.6 | 2.4 |
| Head length | 32.6 | 20 | 29.5 | 33.1 | 31.4 | 1.1 |
| Pectoral-spine length | 28.0 | 20 | 23.7 | 29.5 | 26.8 | 1.6 |
| Dorsal-spine length | 24.4 | 19 | 21.4 | 27.3 | 24.8 | 1.8 |
| Dorsal-fin length | 30.8 | 19 | 26.1 | 36.7 | 30.0 | 3.2 |
| Predorsal length | 39.9 | 20 | 35.7 | 41.0 | 38.7 | 1.2 |
| Prepectoral length | 23.5 | 20 | 22.4 | 26.0 | 24.3 | 0.8 |
| Prepelvic length | 53.5 | 20 | 51.1 | 57.0 | 54.8 | 1.4 |
| Preanal length | 72.3 | 20 | 68.1 | 75.5 | 73.0 | 1.8 |
| Caudal total length | 34.5 | 20 | 26.7 | 43.7 | 33.1 | 4.6 |
| Distance between dorsal and adipose fins | 19.3 | 20 | 13.6 | 19.3 | 16.9 | 1.6 |
| Adipose fin-base length | 20.9 | 20 | 19.6 | 23.1 | 21.3 | 0.9 |
| Maximum height of adipose fin | 6.7 | 20 | 4.8 | 7.0 | 6.2 | 0.5 |
| Adipose to caudal peduncle | 12.1 | 20 | 11.1 | 13.3 | 12.3 | 0.7 |
| Caudal peduncle length | 17.3 | 20 | 15.5 | 18.6 | 16.7 | 0.8 |
| Caudal peduncle depth | 11.7 | 20 | 10.3 | 12.2 | 11.0 | 0.5 |
| Percent of head length | | | | | | |
| Head width | 75.2 | 20 | 75.1 | 83.0 | 79.0 | 2.3 |
| Orbital diameter | 21.2 | 20 | 20.6 | 26.5 | 22.9 | 1.7 |
| Interorbital distance | 35.8 | 20 | 32.1 | 38.3 | 35.5 | 1.5 |
| Snout length | 47.5 | 20 | 45.7 | 49.8 | 48.1 | 1.3 |
| Postorbital length | 35.9 | 20 | 31.9 | 35.9 | 34.4 | 1.0 |
| Internal mandibular barbel length | 31.8 | 20 | 27.1 | 37.1 | 31.7 | 2.5 |
| External mandibular barbel length | 52.3 | 20 | 48.5 | 64.1 | 56.4 | 4.0 |
| Maxillary barbel length | 101.9 | 20 | 72.2 | 105.2 | 93.6 | 8.1 |
| Humeral process length | 57.9 | 20 | 54.3 | 67.6 | 60.3 | 4.1 |
| Humeral process height | 26.0 | 20 | 22.3 | 33.3 | 27.5 | 2.8 |
| Percentage of snout length | | | | | | |
| Orbital diameter | 44.7 | 20 | 42.7 | 56.3 | 47.8 | 4.4 |
| Interorbital distance | 75.3 | 20 | 67.3 | 78.9 | 73.9 | 3.1 |
| Postorbital length | 75.6 | 20 | 66.9 | 75.6 | 71.7 | 2.4 |
| Meristics | | | | | | |
| | | N | min | max | median | |
| Dorsal-fin rays | I,7 | 20 | I,7 | I,7 | I,7 | |
| Pectoral-fin rays | I,8 | 20 | I,7 | I,8 | I,8 | |
| Pelvic-fin rays | i,6 | 20 | i,6 | iii,6 | iii,6 | |
| Anal-fin rays | iii,8 | 20 | iii,7 | iii,9 | iii,8 | |
| Mandibular teeth | 16 | 20 | 12 | 19 | 16 | |
| Primary maxillary teeth | 30 | 20 | 29 | 40 | 34 | |
| Total gill rakers on first arch | 16 | 20 | 14 | 17 | 15-16 | |
| Gill rakers on ceratobranchial | 12 | 20 | 10 | 13 | 12 | |

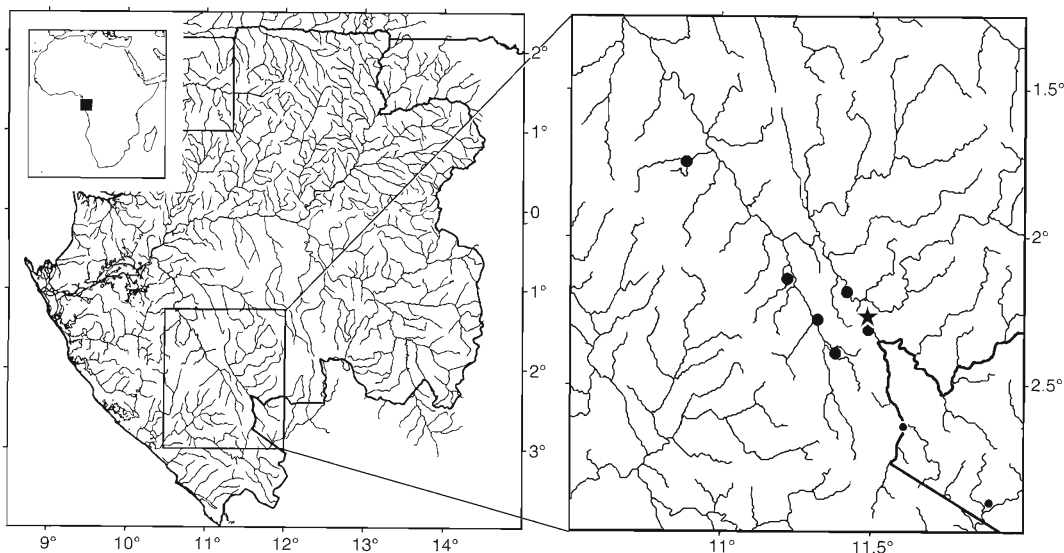


Fig. 2. Distribution of *Synodontis ngouniensis*. ★: type locality; ●: paratype localities; and •: additional localities.

often a caudal fin with a typical whitish central V-like part but with a dark border along all edges in *S. tessmanni*).

Description. Based on type series (20 specimens, 79.6-146.8 mm SL). Selected body proportions and meristics in Table 1. See Figure 1 for shape and general appearance. Maximum length observed: 147 mm SL (190 mm TL). An elongate species with more or less straight dorsal and ventral surfaces, when viewed laterally; maximum body depth near origin of dorsal fin, slightly decreasing towards level of anal-fin origin. Lateral line situated along lateral midline of body but hardly visible. Dorsal profile of head slightly convex from tip of snout to dorsal spine. Skull strongly ossified, with numerous granules. Head narrow with pointed snout.

Mouth inferior. Two irregular rows of unicuspid teeth on ventral shelf of the premaxillary toothplate. 12-19 long and slender mandibular teeth, arranged in small concentrated ovoid patch. Lips curved with prominent lateral lobes; lobes covered with rounded papillae. Upper lip with fringed rostral flap. Eye in posterolateral position and of moderate size. Maxillary barbel reaching slightly beyond posterior base of pectoral fin, i.e. up to $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of horizontal humeral spine length. Outer mandibular barbels reaching up to posterior border of pectoral-spine base or pectoral-fin

base, with long, branched ramifications. Inner mandibular barbels reaching up to below horizontal middle of eye or below posterior border of eye, with shorter, thick, branched ramifications.

Gill opening situated laterally above pectoral fin, not extending beyond base of pectoral fin. Gill rakers long and smooth, 10-13 on ceratobranchial, 0-1 at angle and 2-3 on epibranchial of first branchial arch.

Humeral process triangular, flat, granulated above with weak ridge. Upper and lower margin of humeral process convex.

Dorsal-fin base rather short with distal edge of fin slightly convex. Adipose fin moderately deep and with a round outline, well separated from dorsal fin, situated right above anal fin and as long as latter. Pectoral fin with strong spine. Pectoral spine covered with 26-40 serrae on entire anterior side, on most proximal part of spine anteriorly directed and more distal part outwardly directed. Pectoral spine covered with 13-18, inwardly directed, serrae on outer $\frac{3}{4}$ up to $\frac{5}{6}$ of posterior side of spine. Serrae larger distally and more numerous with increasing size. Anal fin with convex distal margin. Pelvic fin reaching level of anal fin origin. Caudal fin forked with pointed lobes; upper lobe slightly longer than lower.

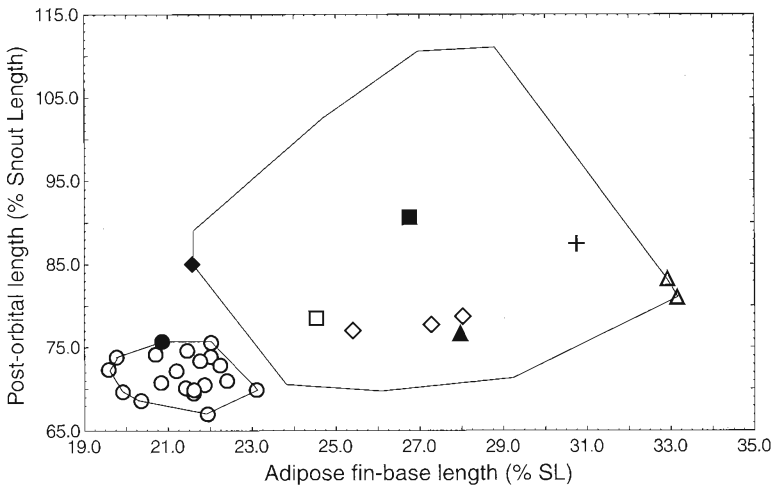


Fig. 3. Scatterplot of the adipose fin-base length (% SL) against the post-orbital length (% snout length) for *Synodontis ngouiniensis* and the specimens of the *S. obesus/rebeli*-complex. *S. ngouiniensis*: ● holotype and ○ paratypes; *S. obesus*: ▲ lectotype, △ paralectotypes; *S. rebeli*: ■ lectotype, □ paralectotypes; *S. loppei*: + syntype (= *S. obesus*); *S. hollyi*: ◆ syntype (= *S. obesus*), and *S. hollyi*: ◇ syntypes (= *S. rebeli*). Full lines enclosing the cluster of specimens attributed to *S. ngouiniensis* and the *S. obesus/rebeli* complex.

Coloration. Preserved specimens dark brown to black with distinct white lines or dots on head, flank, belly and adipose (Fig. 1). Lines and dots sometimes less conspicuous on belly. Abdomen and ventral part of head generally lighter. Flanks of some specimens with a more purplish tinge. All fins uniformly dark, lighter in some specimens, except for adipose fin, which has same markings as body. Dorsal and pectoral spines lighter than rest of fins. Maxillary barbels dark brown with a broad black membrane; mandibular barbels creamy. Lips whitish.

Etymology. Specific name referring to the Ngounié River basin, type locality of the new species.

Distribution. The entire type series of *S. ngouiniensis* is from the Ngounié River basin, the major southern affluent of the Ogooué River (Gabon). Further, the new species has recently been collected from another Ngounié tributary, i.e. the Ngongo River, in the Republic of Congo. In addition, a single specimen has been collected from the upper part of the Nyanga River basin, i.e. a smaller coastal river basin situated just south of the Ogooué basin, in the Republic of Congo (Fig. 2).

Ecology. Lavoué (pers. comm.) provided some data for the Dola River at Ndendé (Gabon). The river is approximately 24 m wide at this locality. Fishes were caught at a depth of 0.80 m, above a sand/gravel substrate with gill nets. The water was opaque, alkaline (pH 8.41), with a high conductivity ($282 \mu\text{S}\cdot\text{cm}^{-1}$) and with a temperature of 24.0°C .

Discussion. Apart from its colour pattern, *S. ngouiniensis* is further distinguished from specimens attributed to the *S. obesus/rebeli* complex (Fermon et al., 2007) by a slightly lower number of mandibular teeth (12-19 vs. 21-47) and the combination of a somewhat shorter adipose fin-base length and post-orbital length (Fig. 3). According to the data provided by Poll (1971), also *S. robbianus* can be distinguished from *S. ngouiniensis* based on these characters (adipose fin-base length 30.5-39.2 % SL, post-orbital length 81.8-92.9 % of snout length).

Synodontis ngouiniensis and *S. tessmanni*, known from the Nyong, Ntem and Ivindo (Ogooué) River basins (Cameroon and Gabon) (Fermon et al., 2007), have an important overlap in the number of mandibular teeth, i.e. 12-19 vs. 14-24. However, besides the above mentioned colour pattern differences, both species are further distinguished by a combined only slightly shorter

1978-725, 1, 129.4 mm SL; Sanaga River. – MNHN 1987-557, 1, 95.7 mm SL; Edea, Sanaga River. – NMW 7796, lectotype, 191.6 mm SL; NMW 7797, 1 paralectotype, 166.4 mm SL; Mbam River. – MRAC 165676, 1, 158.2 mm SL; Sanaga River, Edea market. – MRAC 168136, 1, 133.2 mm SL; Nachtigal, Sanaga River. – MRAC 168559, 1, 162.1 mm SL; Nachtigal, Sanaga River. – MRAC 75-4-P-24, 1, 15.3 mm SL; Nyong River, 12 km SE of Eseka, above falls. – MRAC 93-15-P-77-78, 2, 148.1-154.1 mm SL; Mape River, in-between dam and mouth, Mape in Mbam, 5°59'N 11°16'E. – MRAC 93-15-P-82, 1, 138.9 mm SL; MRAC 93-15-P-87-88, 2, 157.4-171.3 mm SL; Mbam River, near Masaroum (Mamboungam), 5°58'N 11°14'E. – MRAC 93-52-P-160, 1, 119.1 mm SL; Mantoum, Mbam River after confluence with Nchi, 5°36'N 11°09'E. – MRAC 93-82-P-520-524, 3, 114.1-124.9 mm SL; Bongola River, at rapids, before confluence with Ntem, 2°17'N 9°58'E. – MRAC 93-82-P-525-531, 4, 112.1-150.5 mm SL; Mvini River, at confluence with Bongola, 2°19'N 10°6'E. – MRAC 93-85-P-291-295, 1, 117.2 mm SL; Bongola River, after rapids, before confluence with Ntem, 2°17'N 9°58'E. – MRAC 94-49-P-564-568, 5, 78.5-165.8 mm SL; Manki II, Mvi River, 5°51'N 11°06'E. – MRAC 95-54-P-377, 1, 116.5 mm SL; Sanaga Basin: Lom River at Waskaso, 6°19'N 14°30'E. – MRAC 95-54-P-378, 1, 143.2 mm SL; Sanaga Basin: Lom River at 2 km before mouth of Panghar, 5°21'N 13°31'E. – MRAC 95-88-P-455, 1, 114.5 mm SL; MRAC 95-88-P-456-458, 3, 52.0-74.5 mm SL; Sanaga Basin: Mvi River at Manki II, 5°53'N 11°07'E. – MRAC 95-88-P-459-460, 2, 107.2-112.5 mm SL; MRAC 95-88-P-461, 1, 73.3 mm SL; Nachtigal Falls, Middle Sanaga, 4°21'N 11°38'E.

Synodontis tessmanni: MRAC 93-085-P-0296-0300, 5, 104.8-127.8 mm SL; Nkyé River, near to Adjou'ou. – MRAC A1-070-P-2775-2780, 6, 98.1-141.3 mm SL; Ntem River, at hotel Ayengbe-sur-Ntem. – MRAC A2-006-P-2618-2623, 6, 83.8-95.6 mm SL; Ogowe Basin, Ivindo River, Loa-Loa.

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