

## Threatened fishes of the world: *Caecobarbus geertsii* Boulenger, 1921 (Cyprinidae)

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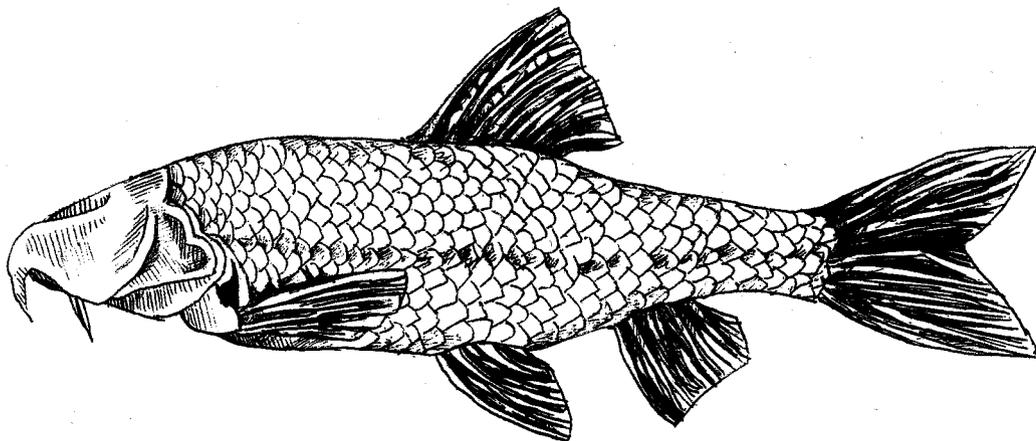
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**Common name:** Congo blind barb (E), barbu aveugle (F).

**Conservation status:** Vulnerable (VU A1e, B1 + 2e, D2), World Conservation Monitoring Centre, CITES Appendix II.

**Identification:** It is very similar to primitive species of the genus *Barbus*, except for the lack of externally visible eyes and pigmentation.



Laterally compressed body. Snout rounded and depressed by the mouth. D II/7-8, A III/5, P I/11-15, V I/7-8. Upper lobe of the caudal fin slightly longer than the lower one. Vestigial eyes present. Maximum length: 110 mm. It has very thin ctenoid scales that on the lateral line number 28–29. Head scaleless (Boulenger 1921). **Distribution:** In lower Congo near Kanka (formerly Thysville) near Mbanza-Ngungu (5°18' S, 14°50' E), Congo River system (Heuts & Leleup 1954). **Abundance:** The seven caves where this fish has been found may total 7000 individuals. **Habitat and ecology:** They live in caves characterized by cyclic food scarcity (Heuts 1951). **Reproduction:** They spawn in a side to side fashion and produce demersal adhesive eggs. Young animals are observed only after the rainy season. Longevity may surpass 15 years. **Threats:** It is a species commercially traded as an aquarium novelty. Large numbers have been exported in the past to industrialized nations. In 1993 alone a CITES certificate was issued to import 1500 individuals into the United States. Since they have never been bred in captivity, demand is constant. **Conservation action:** This is the only hypogean fish whose trade is regulated by CITES. **Conservation recommendations:** Collection should be limited for scientific purposes only and for good reasons. Protection of its habitat should be carried out. Yet, probably the best way to protect this species would be by developing a protocol for its captive breeding which will eliminate the demand for capturing it in its natural habitat. **Remarks:** It tends to aggregate based on conspecific odors, is scotophilic (moves away from light), and responds to the alarm substance (Jankowska & Thinès 1982). This species was the first troglomorphic species described outside the American continent. A great deal of experimental work has been carried out on the behavior and physiology of this species (Romero & Benz 2000).

Boulenger, G.A. 1921. Description d'un poisson aveugle decouvert par M.G. Geerts dans la grotte de Thysville (Bas-Congo). *Rev. Zool. Afr.* 9: 252–253

Heuts, M.J. 1951. Ecology, variation and adaptation of the blind African cave fish *Caecobarbus geertsii* Blgr. *Ann. Soc. Roy. Belg.* 82: 155–230.

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Jankowska, M. & G. Thinès. 1982. A comparative study of group density in cave and epigeal fishes. *Behav. Proc.* 7: 281–294.

Romero, A. & K. Benz. 2000. The unsung heroes of speleology. *Nat. Speleol. Soc. News* 58: 106, 126.