

Aspredo aspredo (Banjo Catfish)

Family: Aspredinidae (Banjo Catfish)

Order: Siluriformes (Catfish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



Fig. 1. Banjo catfish, *Aspredo aspredo*.

[http://www.planetcatfish.com/common/species.php?species_id=949, downloaded 1 April 2015]

TRAITS. A naked (without scales) catfish, *A. aspredo* is the largest species of the family Aspredinidae, achieving a length of about 38cm. They usually have 7 pectoral fin rays, 50 anal fin rays, a long tail with a continuous bony dorsal ridge, 10 caudal (tail) fin rays and a small barbel at the base of the main barbel. The rows of bony tubercles (body armour, as they lack scales) on the body are highly reduced. They also lack a locking mechanism for the dorsal spine. The banjo catfish gets its name from its body shape (Fig. 1) which is characterized as being a broad, flattened head and body with a long slender caudal peduncle (tail base) (Fig. 2). The flattened body allows them to hide under objects. They have very small eyes and mouth. *Aspredo aspredo* has a uniform colour, lacking patterns of dark saddles, unlike other species of banjo catfish.

DISTRIBUTION. *A. aspredo* can be found throughout Central and South America ranging from northern Brazil to Venezuela and Guyana as well as Trinidad, in lower portions of rivers.

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Typically found on sandy and muddy bottoms in river mouths where the water is turbid and sometimes travel further up stream to fresher water. It can also be

found in brackish water near mangroves. They prefer areas containing debris such as leaf litter so that they can hide. They are mostly benthic meaning that they prefer to occupy the lowest possible level of the stream river or pool they are in which usually is the sediment surface. They are semi fossorial meaning that they prefer to burrow and usually spend the day partially buried. They are mostly quiet and immobile during the day unless they are disturbed and appear for the most part to be nocturnal. Due to this sedentary nature and docile behaviour they rarely hunt for food.

FOOD AND FEEDING. Typically omnivorous they tend to feed on aquatic invertebrates such as earth worms and terrestrial insects. They can also be classed as scavengers due to the fact that they feed on organic waste. Apart from that not much is known about their feeding habits and choice of food. Due to their lack of physical protection they tend to lie in wait for food, and feed mostly in the night.

POPULATION ECOLOGY. They are for the most part solitary and benthic creatures which possess a life expectancy of 10-15 years. They have not been properly observed in the wild but a little information has been obtained on them in captivity, where they get along with their own kind as well as with other species of fish.

REPRODUCTION. There has been very little information published about reproduction in this species. However they are known to lay eggs during the early parts of the year and the mother carries the eggs attached under its belly by fleshy stalks referred to as cotylephores (Fig. 3). The cotylephores are suggested to transfer material from the mother to the embryo and they develop seasonally (Friel, 1994). The suggested reason for having eggs on the cotylephores is that it is an adaptation to the oxygen depressed conditions of the brackish water. By having the eggs attached to the stalks fresh oxygenated water can constantly flow over the eggs when the mother is moving.

BEHAVIOUR. *A. aspredo* is a very peaceful species but when threatened they produce sounds by rubbing their pectoral spines against the body. They are inactive and rarely move during the day. They are solitary and spend their time being alone however in captivity it is noted that they have no problem being among other fish.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *A. aspredo* has not been listed by the IUCN. They have no known disease and are not red listed as having any conservation threats. Although they aren't hunted for food and meat they are captured for aquarium purposes. They are mainly utilized by pet owners for the purpose of keeping aquariums clean. They tend to scavenge and eat whatever organic debris is present.

REFERENCES

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http://www.planetcatfish.com/common/image.php?species=aspredo_aspredo&image_id=3045, downloaded 27 March 2015.
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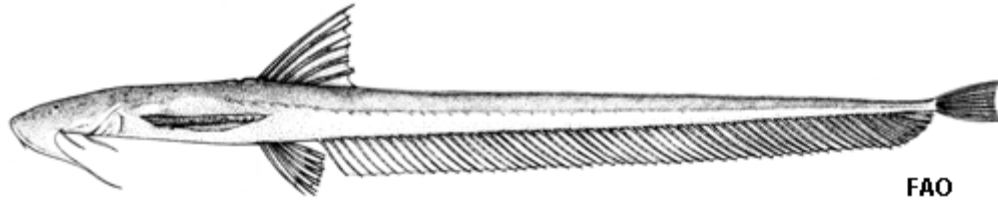


Fig. 2. Flattened shape of the banjo catfish.

[<http://www.fishbase.us/Photos/PicturesSummary.php?StartRow=1&ID=7521&what=species&TotRec=3>, downloaded 5 May 2015]



Fig. 3. Eggs attached to female *Aspredo aspredo* by cotylephores.

[<http://www.fishbase.us/Photos/PicturesSummary.php?ID=7521&what=species>, downloaded 5 May 2015]