

Hypostomus robinii (Teta Fish or Mama-teta)

Family: Loricariidae (Suckermouth Armoured Catfish)

Order: Siluriformes (Catfish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



Fig. 1. Teta fish, *Hypostomus robinii*.

[<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/288723026086874486/>, downloaded 20 October 2016]

TRAITS. The tetra fish is also goes by the names mama-teta (Trinidad and Tobago Biodiversity, 2012) or Anne Marie, and is often mistakenly called the pleco after its close relative *Hypostomus plecostomus* (Deacon, 2015). These fish can grow to be around 15-23cm in length, in some cases even 30cm. This member of the suckermouth armoured catfish family is yellow-brown in colour (sometimes darker) with a pale belly and leopard spots (Deacon, 2015) all over its body and along its fins (Fig. 1). It has a flat, broad head with a tapering tail and snout and a flat belly (Winer, 2008). A specialised suckermouth underneath the snout aids in feeding and attachment to solid substratum (Fig. 2). On either side of their mouth is a short fleshy tentacle. Dorsal (on the back), pectoral (on the sides of the upper abdomen), pelvic (on the sides of the lower abdomen) and tail fins are all spotted, with strong spines, and aid in attachment to substratum as well (Wikipedia, 2016). Bony plates replace scales, covering most of its body excluding its soft belly. They have a specialised stomach that acts as a lung, allowing them to breathe air when needed. They have also evolved a crescent-shaped pupil so that their eye is camouflaged (Deacon, 2015).

DISTRIBUTION. Endemic to Trinidad. Found in rivers throughout the country though more common in streams on the southern side of the Northern Range (Fig. 3) (Kenny, 1995).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. Inhabits a variety of habitats from free-flowing, clear-water streams to turbid stagnant waters. It lives on and near the bottom of these areas and feeds on periphyton - the community of tiny organisms that lives on the surfaces of rooted aquatic plants (Dictionary.com, 2016) and algae (FishBase, 2016). Using its specialised mouth, *Hypostomus robinii* scrapes or grazes the solid substratum of its environment for food through a rasping action (Deacon, 2015). Active both during the day and night (Kenny, 1995).

REPRODUCTION. What little is known of reproduction in this species is that the females lay sticky eggs (about 20-200) on a solid spot on the bed of the river and a male then fertilizes them. The male will stay with the eggs guarding them and keeping them oxygenated by fanning them, until they hatch. Hatching usually occurs 7-10 days after fertilization (Deacon, 2015).

BEHAVIOUR. The tetra fish is prey to *Hoplias malabaricus*, more commonly known as the guabine. Their colouration and unique pupils help camouflage them amongst the sediment of the watercourses they inhabit (Fig. 4). They are also able to dig holes to hide in using their suckermouth. If all else fails they are able to swim away quickly due to their large tail fin. When under stress tetra fish make a grunting sound, which is believed to either serve to warn others of danger or ward off predators (Deacon, 2015).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. *Hypostomus robinii* is regarded as harmless to humans and is not evaluated on the ICUN Red List. This fish is considered a delicacy to locals. It is also captured for commercial use as an aquarium fish; popular for its taste for algae on the sides of aquariums, keeping the glass clean (Kenny, 1995).

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Fig. 2. Suckermouth on the underside of the tetra fish.

[<http://amydeacon.weebly.com/writing/category/fish>, downloaded 13 October 2016]

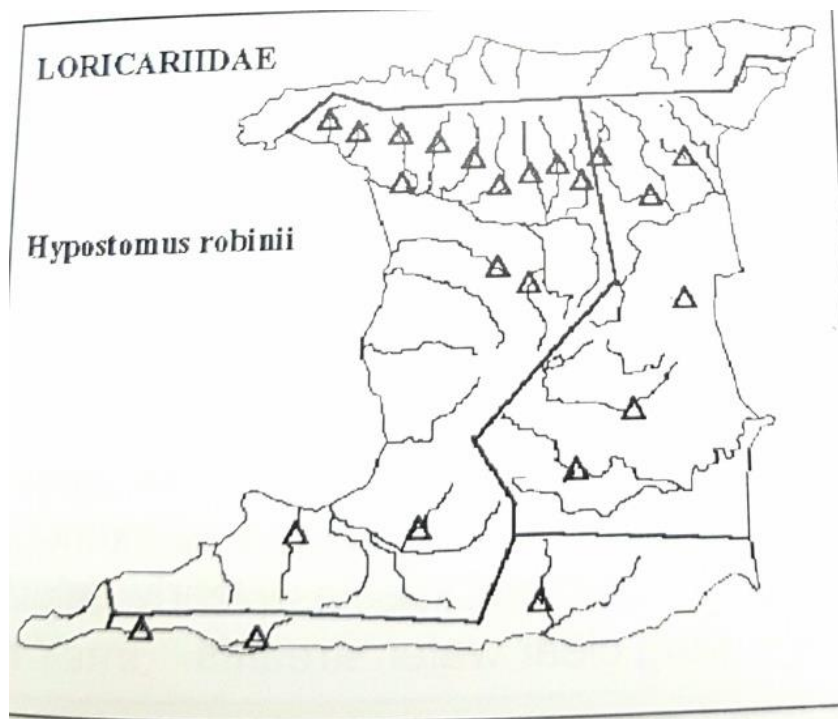


Fig. 3. *Hypostomus robinii* geographic distribution in Trinidad.

[From Kenny, 1995]



Fig. 4. Head of tetra fish, showing crescent-shaped pupil.

[<http://amydeacon.weebly.com/writing/category/fish>, downloaded 13 October 2016]

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