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## Causes and effects of the Lake Victoria ecological revolution

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CHAPTER 2

**The invasion of an introduced predator, Nile perch  
(*Lates niloticus*) in Lake Victoria (East Africa):  
Chronology and causes.**

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**Abstract**

Nile perch, a large predatory fish, was introduced into Lake Victoria in 1954. The upsurge of Nile perch in Lake Victoria was first observed in the Nyanza Gulf, Kenya, in 1979. In Ugandan waters this occurred 2-3 years later and in the Tanzanian Mwanza Gulf 4-5 years later. At the beginning of the upsurge in the Mwanza Gulf in 1983/84 only sub-adult and adult fishes were found. The first juveniles appeared in 1985, suggesting that the initial increase of Nile perch was mainly caused by migration of sub-adults and adults. Shortly after the onset of trawl fishery in the area in 1973, haplochromines in the Mwanza Gulf started to decline. The final disappearance of the haplochromines, in 1987, only occurred after the Nile perch boom, and despite the abandoning of the haplochromine fishery in 1986. We hypothesise that the decline of haplochromines decreased predation on and competition with juvenile Nile perch and facilitated survival of these juveniles. Consequently the immigration of sub-adult and adult Nile perch in an area may have paved the way for successful recruitment. Over-exploitation of haplochromine cichlids in the 1970s in the Nyanza Gulf, where the Nile perch upsurge was first observed, may have played a similar role.

## **Introduction**

The, intended or unintended, introduction of animals to areas outside their natural distribution, has taken place for centuries (Williamson, 1996). However, within Africa, the transfer of fish species from one water system into another is a relatively recent phenomenon. Most species were transferred between the 1920s and 1970s with a peak (67 species) in the 1950s (Welcomme, 1988). Worldwide, 237 fish species were transferred, of which the fate of 72 has been reported. Of these, 25 were harmful for the indigenous fauna and/or the local environment (Beverton, 1992). The introduction of Nile perch, *Lates niloticus* L., into Lake Victoria is regarded to belong to this last group (Barel et al., 1985; Ogotu-Ohwayo, 1990a; Kaufman, 1992; Witte et al., 1992a,b).

Nile perch were unofficially introduced into Lake Victoria in August 1954, when Nile perch from Lake Albert were released at Jinja, Uganda (Amaras, 1986). In May 1960, local fishermen reported the first Nile perch from gillnet catches near Jinja. Seven others were reported in the same year. All these fishes were sub-adults ranging in size from 28 to 43 cm (Hamblyn, 1961).

After heavy debates (Fryer, 1960; Anderson, 1961; Pringle, 2005), the first official introductions of Nile perch took place in May 1962 and September 1963 at Entebbe, Uganda. They originated from Lake Albert and comprised respectively 35 fishes between 16 and 43 cm, and 339 fingerlings (Gee, 1964). In the Nyanza Gulf, Kenya, eight Nile perches from Lake Turkana were released in 1963 (Arunga, 1981; Pringle, 2005). During a bottom trawl survey in

1969/70 Nile perch was caught lake wide in low densities (Kudhongania & Cordone, 1974b). In the 1980s the species suddenly increased strongly, but not simultaneously, throughout the lake.

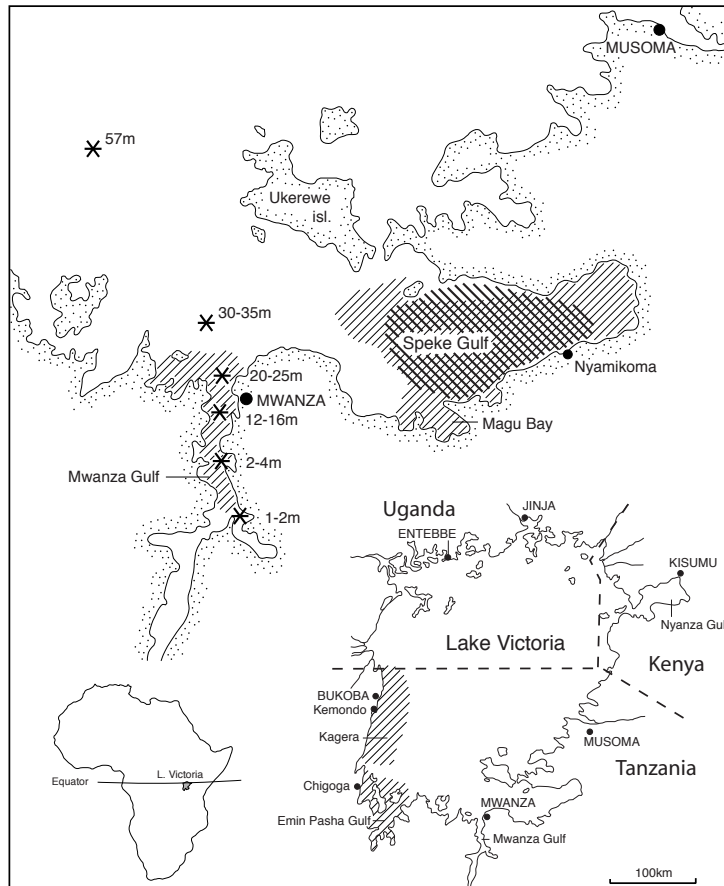
The effects of the Nile perch boom on the indigenous fauna of Lake Victoria, has been discussed in several publications (Barel et al., 1985; Hughes, 1986; Ogotu-Ohwayo, 1990a; Witte et al., 1992a,b; Goldschmidt et al., 1993; Chapter 6 - Goudswaard & Witte, 1997; Chapter 7 - Goudswaard et al., 2002b; Chapter 8 – Goudswaard et al., 2002a). Remarkably, the process by which Nile perch established itself successfully in Lake Victoria is an underexposed aspect in the whole discussion.

In this paper we present data on Nile perch densities, length frequency distributions, the appearance of recruits, and the decline of the haplochromines during successive periods at different localities. Although the data sets from several areas are incomplete, to our knowledge they are the best available. With the aid of these data, we make an attempt to elucidate the process of colonisation of Lake Victoria by Nile perch.

## **Material and techniques**

In the Tanzanian waters of Lake Victoria fishing was done with MV Kiboko (105 hp, bottom trawl head rope 18 m, codend mesh 20 mm), which made trawl shots of half an hour. The sampling period ran from October 1984 until July 1990. Most frequently fished was the Mwanza Gulf where five stations, with a soft mud bottom and a depth range from 1.5 m in the south to 35 m in the north, were sampled on a monthly basis. A sixth

**Fig. 2.1.** Map of Lake Victoria with main fishing areas discussed in the present study. Hatched areas in the Mwanza Gulf were fished by MV Mdiria. Asterisks in the Mwanza Gulf were sampling stations of MV Kiboko. The hatched area in the Speke Gulf was fished by MV Mdiria and MV Kiboko. The double hatched area in the Speke Gulf was also fished by commercial trawlers. The hatched areas in the Emin Pasha Gulf and Kagera area were fished by MV Kiboko and before 1984 occasionally by MV Mdiria and trawlers of the NFPC. (for details see Material and Techniques).



station in deep (57 m) water in the open lake (Fig. 2.1) was fished until the end of 1986 only. On a quarterly basis some distant areas also were fished: (i) Kagera - an open water area in the western part of the lake with a mud/clay bottom. The depths that were fished ranged from 4 m in the west to 48 m in the east. The shallow areas were restricted to Chigoga and Kemonondo Bay as well as the area near Bukoba harbour. (ii) Speke Gulf - a large bay in the south-east corner of the lake with a soft muddy bottom and a depth ranging from 2 m in the east to 34 m in the west.

(iii) The Emin-Pasha Gulf in the southwest corner of the lake was surveyed in 1985 and 1986. The area is up to 18 m deep and has a mud and sandy bottom. Directly north of the gulf the lake floor deepens to 48 meters.

Data from other bottom trawlers were also used: MV Mdiria (170 hp, trawl head rope 25 m, codend mesh 20 and 90 mm) fished in the Mwanza Gulf and incidentally elsewhere. Four boats of the Nyanza Fishing and Processing Company (NFPC) (170 hp, trawl head rope 21 m, codend mesh 90 mm) fished in the Emin Pasha Gulf from November 1975 to August 1976. After

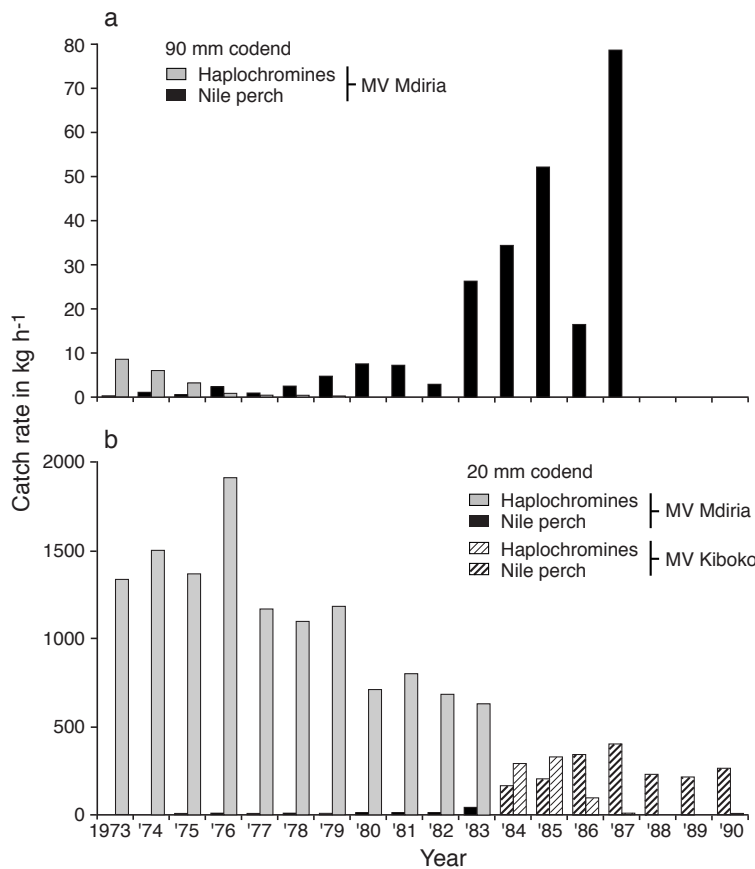
this period they did not fish in this area anymore. A commercial company operated in the Speke Gulf with three trawlers, (75 hp, head rope 17 m, codend mesh 70 mm). These boats started fishing in 1986 and daily records were available up to June 1990. Nile perch was, for commercial reasons, separated by the crew in small (< 35 cm TL) and big (>35 cm) fishes. Data in this paper from other ships than MV Kiboko are based on the daily catch records of the crews of the different ships between 1973 and 1990.

Trawling time of all above-mentioned vessels varied, from half an hour to 2 hours, but was recalculated to

catch h<sup>-1</sup>. Total weights of Nile perch and haplochromines per haul were measured. The total length (TL) of Nile perch was measured and rounded to the nearest cm below.

Trawl data from Ugandan and Kenyan waters were obtained from literature (Table I).

Catch data were tested for normal distribution with a Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. Most Nile perch catches were not normally distributed. Therefore, we used Mann-Whitney U tests to test for differences in catch sizes between years and for differences in catch sizes of different size



**Fig. 2.2.** Catch rates of Nile perch and haplochromines by bottom trawlers in the Mwanza Gulf.

a) 90 mm codend mesh during the period 1973 till 1987 (3875 hrs trawling).

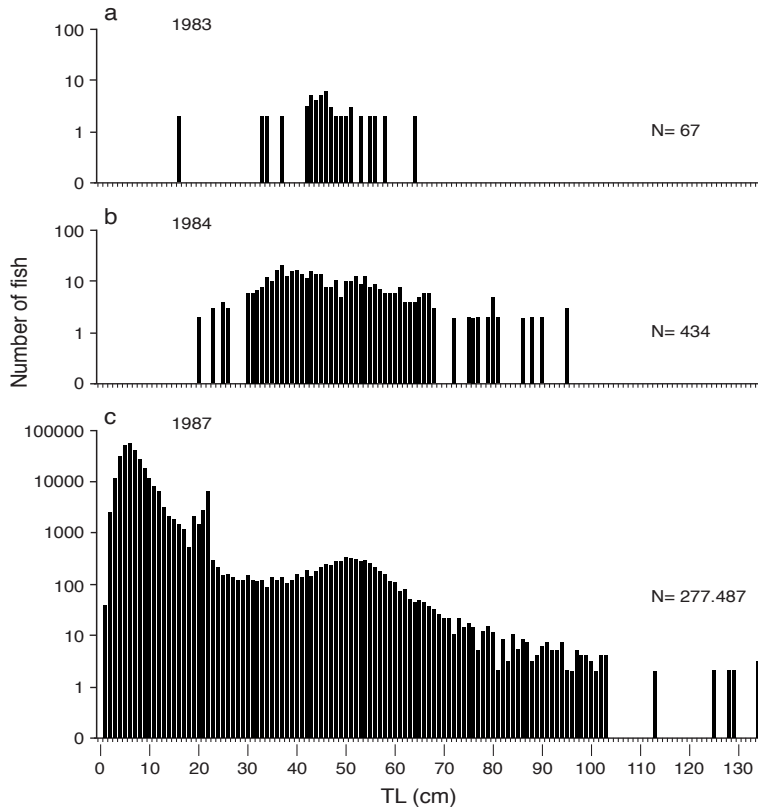
b) 20 mm codend mesh during the period 1973 to 1990. The data from 1984 till 1990 (543 hrs trawling) for the 20 mm net are from MV Kiboko, all other data from MV Mdiria (2176 hrs trawling).

**Table 1.** Mean catch rates ( $\text{kg h}^{-1}$ ) of Nile perch and haplochromines in bottom trawl catches made in the Ugandan waters, the Nyanza Gulf (Kenya) and in four different areas in Tanzania. Nile perch catches for the first time reaching values  $\geq 45 \text{ kg h}^{-1}$  (an arbitrarily chosen density) are given in bold. Asterisks indicate the first year that juvenile Nile perch  $\leq 10 \text{ cm}$  were observed. All 1969 data are from Kudhongania and Cordone (1974). The Nyanza Gulf data are from Benda (1981), Okemwa (1981), Fisheries Department Nairobi, Kenya (1988) and Ogari & Asila (1990). Data from Ugandan waters are from Acere (1988). Tanzanian data from 1973 till 1983 are from MV Mdiria and from 1984-1990 from MV Kiboko. Hauls made in 1969 and in Ugandan waters were made with trawlers ranging from 105-180 hp, utilizing conventional bottom trawls with head ropes of 18-25 meter and 19 and 38 mm codend mesh. In the Nyanza Gulf, part of the catches was made with a 85 hp trawler, towing a net with a 13.7 m head rope. In this area mainly a 38 mm codend mesh size was used. Hap. = Haplochromines, Np = Nile perch

Year	Uganda		Kenya		Tanzania							
	Hap.	Np.	Nyanza Gulf		Kagera		Speke Gulf		Mwanza Gulf		Emin Pasha Gulf	
			Hap.	Np.	Hap.	Np.	Hap.	Np.	Hap.	Np.	Hap.	Np.
1969	327	+	440	1	610	+	-	-	548	0	-	-
1973	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1235	0	-	-
1974	-	-	149	6	-	-	1294	0	1376	0	-	-
1975	-	-	-	-	308	0	1025	0	1365	1	-	-
1976	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1915	1	-	-
1977	-	-	-	-	490	0	-	-	1165	1	540	0
1978	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1095	1	-	-
1979	-	-	59	* 46	-	-	1005	0	1182	1	-	-
1980	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	709	4	-	-
1981	392	4	0	169	-	-	-	-	789	4	-	-
1982	298	45	0	169	-	-	-	-	682	4	-	-
1983	265	54	-	-	-	-	288	101	629	19	-	-
1984	114	140	-	-	-	-	-	-	290	82	-	-
1985	18	235	-	-	38	* 146	-	-	326	* 103	108	* 71
1986	0	80	9	273	0	259	-	-	93	174	0	76
1987	-	-	-	-	0	244	-	-	4	203	-	-
1988	-	-	0	145	0	199	0	* 224	0	115	-	-
1989	-	-	0	-	0	118	0	119	0	107	-	-
1990	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	163	1	133	-	-

groups. Bonferroni corrections were used in case of repeated use of data. A correlation between mean monthly catch rates of Nile perch by commercial trawlers in the Speke Gulf and months was calculated. As

mean monthly catch rates were normally distributed, the Pearson correlation test was used. All tests were done in SPSS10.0 for Windows.



**Fig. 2.3.** Length frequency distribution of Nile perch in the Mwanza Gulf.

a) October 1982 - April 1983, (N= 67)

b) October - December 1984, (N= 434).

c) January - December 1987 (N=277 487).

Catches were made with MV Kiboko; those from 1982-1983 were made with NFPC trawlers. Note log scale of the Y-axes.

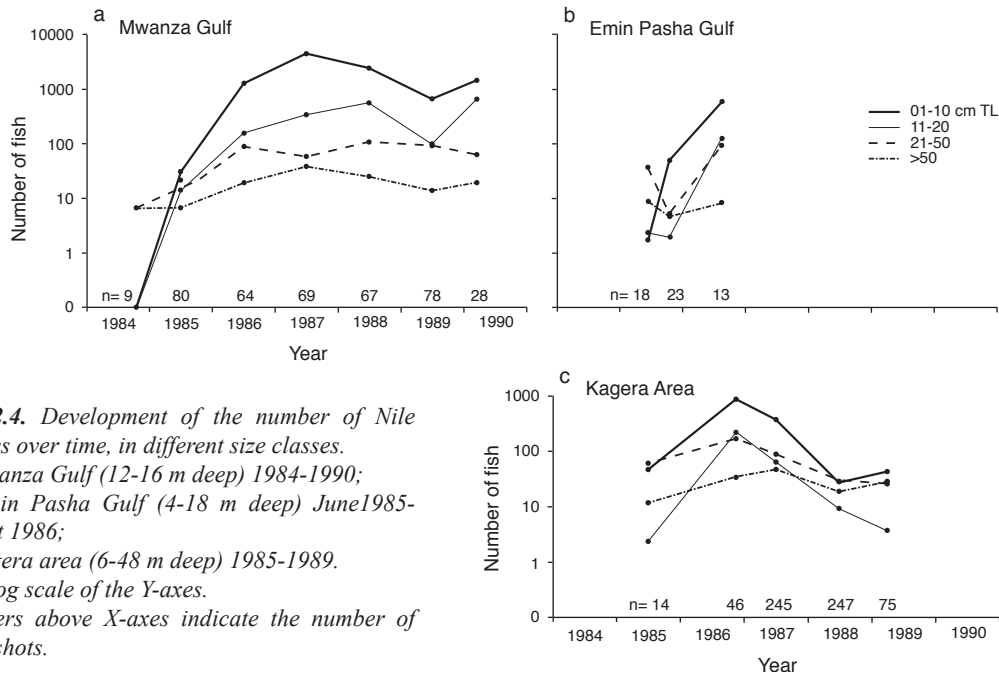
## Results

### *Nile perch appearance in the Tanzanian waters*

In the early 1970s Nile perch were caught in the Mwanza Gulf in small numbers (Fig. 2.2a,b). A slow increase was observed in the second half of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. In 1983 a strong increase was noticed (Fig. 2.2a,b).

Almost all Nile perches that were caught in the Mwanza Gulf between 1977 and 1983 were adults or sub-adults (pers. obs.). The same was observed in bottom trawl catches from 1982/83 (Fig. 2.3a) and from the last quarter of 1984 (Fig. 2.3b). In

1987 small fishes (1-20 cm) were abundant in the catches (Fig. 2.3c). For detailed observations on the increase of small Nile perch we focus on the station of 12-16 m deep in the Mwanza Gulf. Here the number of small sized Nile perch started to increase in 1985. In 1986 and 1987 densities of 1-10 cm Nile perches were significantly higher than in each of the previous years (Fig. 2.4a; Man-Whitney U test  $P=0.000$  in each case). In the following years the densities fluctuated around the same level. In 1984 there were less small Nile perch (1-10 cm TL) than medium and large sized Nile perch (21-50 cm and  $>50$  cm; Mann-Whitney U test,  $P \leq 0.002$  in each case). In 1987 the



**Fig. 2.4.** Development of the number of Nile perches over time, in different size classes. a) Mwanza Gulf (12-16 m deep) 1984-1990; b) Emin Pasha Gulf (4-18 m deep) June 1985-August 1986; c) Kagera area (6-48 m deep) 1985-1989. Note log scale of the Y-axes. Numbers above X-axes indicate the number of trawl shots.

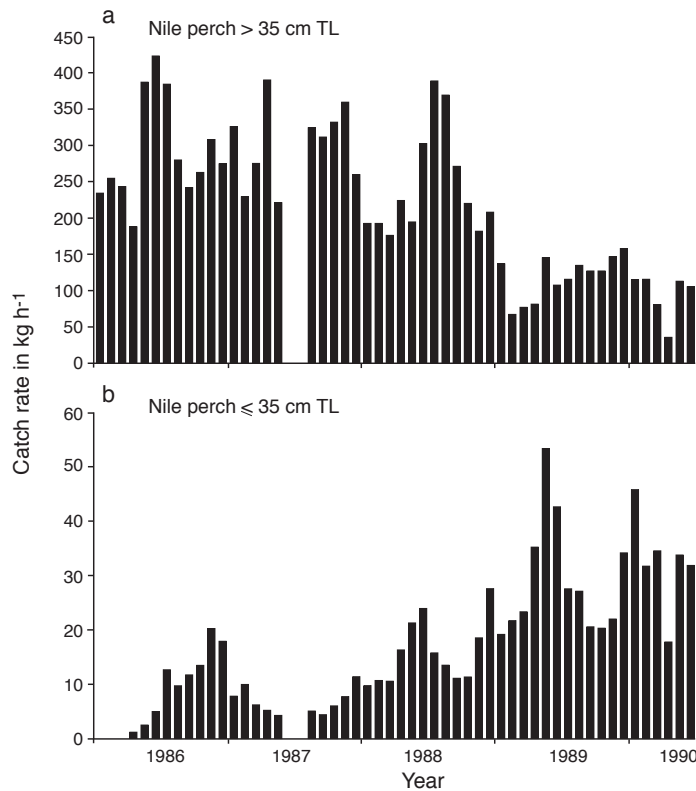
densities of 1-10 cm class Nile perch were significantly higher than the densities of all other classes ( $P = 0.000$  in each case).

In the Emin Pasha Gulf, Nile perch catches showed a similar pattern as in the Mwanza Gulf (Fig. 2.4b). In 1973 and 1974 MV Mdiria fished here with a 60 mm codend mesh for 74 hrs and caught no Nile perch. Between November 1975 and August 1976, bottom trawlers of NFPC caught 6 large Nile perch with a total weight of 172 kg in 850 hours. In 1977 MV Mdiria caught 28 kg Nile perch (possibly one individual) in 12 hrs trawling ( $2.3 \text{ kg h}^{-1}$ ), using either a 20 or a 90 mm codend mesh. In June 1985 MV Kiboko caught in this area 108 kg Nile perch  $\text{h}^{-1}$  (Table 1), containing relatively few juvenile Nile perch (1-10 cm TL; Fig. 2.4b). The densities of these juveniles did

not differ significantly from those of other length classes. In August 1986 the numbers of juveniles had increased (Mann-Whitney U test  $P = 0.000$ ) and were higher than those of large sized Nile perch (Mann-Whitney U test  $P = 0.000$ ).

The Kagera area in 1985 and 1986 revealed similar densities of juvenile Nile perch as found in the Mwanza Gulf in the same years (Fig. 2.4a,c). The same held for the densities in the Emin Pasha Gulf in October 1985 and August 1986 (Fig. 2.4b).

The average monthly catches of large Nile perch in commercial trawlers in the Speke Gulf, decreased over time (Fig. 2.5a; Pearson correlation test:  $R = -0.513$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $N = 58$ ), while the catches of small Nile perch increased (Fig. 2.5b; Pearson correlation test:  $R = 0.812$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ,  $N = 58$ ).



**Fig. 2.5.** Length frequency distribution of Nile perch caught by commercial trawlers in the Speke Gulf, based on 12539 hours of bottom trawling during the period 1986-1990. a) large Nile perch > 35 cm TL; b) small Nile perch ≤ 35 cm TL

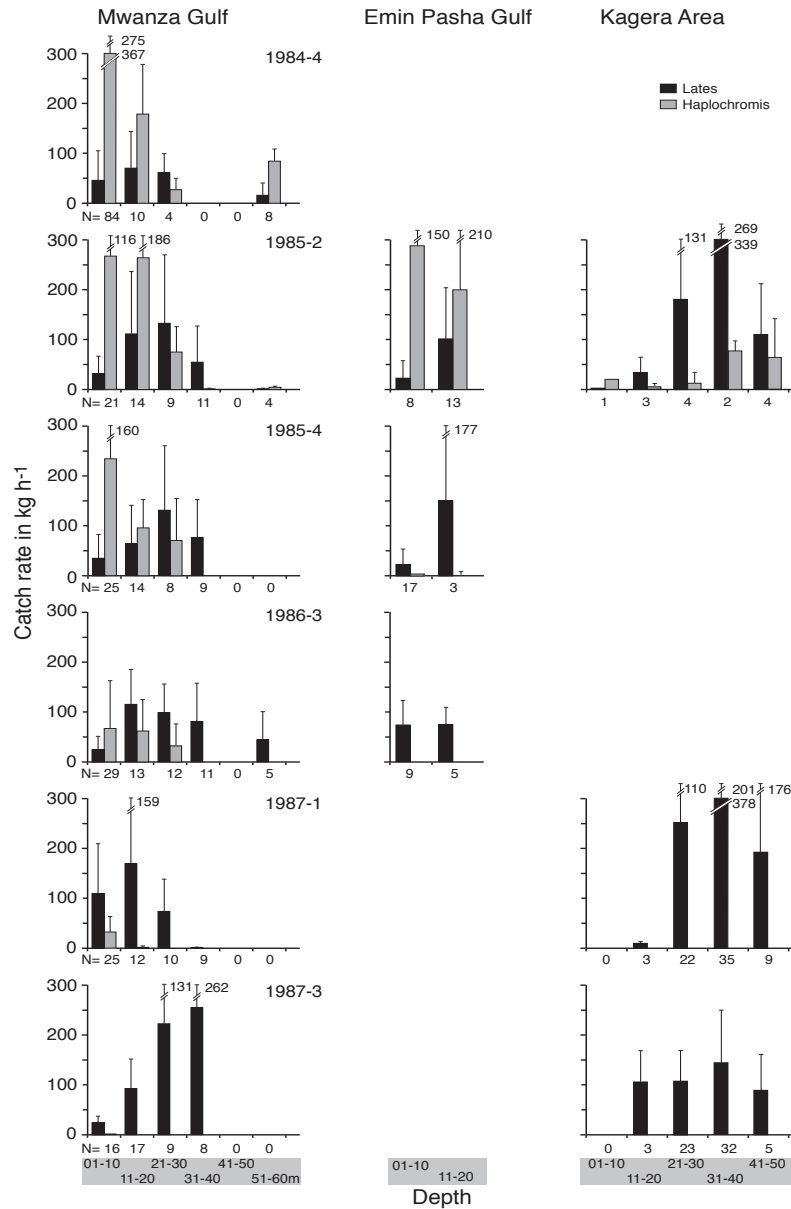
#### *Nile perch upsurge in Kenyan and Ugandan waters of Lake Victoria*

In the Kenyan and Ugandan waters a strong increase of Nile perch occurred earlier than in the Mwanza Gulf (Table 1). In the Nyanza Gulf a catch rate of Nile perch of 46 kg h<sup>-1</sup> was observed already in 1979. Values ≥ 45 kg h<sup>-1</sup> were first observed in the Ugandan waters in 1982 and in the Mwanza Gulf in 1984. Catches above 100 kg h<sup>-1</sup> were reached one or two years later at each of these stations. Juveniles (<10 cm) were present in the Nyanza Gulf in 1979, while they appeared in 1985 for the first time in the Mwanza Gulf.

#### *Nile perch and haplochromines*

The catches of haplochromine cichlids in the Mwanza Gulf declined from the onset of their exploitation with bottom trawlers in 1973 (Fig. 2.2a,b). Large haplochromines (mainly piscivores >17 cm SL) declined much faster than the smaller ones and by 1980 they had disappeared from the catches (Fig. 2.2a). The small species also declined, but at a much slower rate (Fig. 2.2b). The commercial fisheries on this stock stopped in 1986. The trawl survey by MV Kiboko at 5 different depth zones in the Mwanza Gulf showed an increase in Nile perch catches and a concomitant decline of the haplochromines to extremely low levels (Table 1, Fig. 2.6).

Also in other areas of the lake, Nile



**Fig. 2.6.** Average catch rates ( $\text{kg h}^{-1}$ ) of Nile perch and haplochromines in bottom trawls according to depth zone in different years. a) Mwanza Gulf; b) Emin Pasha Gulf; c) Kagera area. Numbers under X-axes indicate the number of trawl shots. Number after years indicated the quarters of the year that catches were made.

perch increase was followed by a strong decline of haplochromines (Table 1, Fig. 2.6). Between November 1975 and August 1976 NFPC trawlers with 90 mm codend mesh fished in the Emin Pasha Gulf for 850

hours and caught on average  $21.9 \pm 7.9 \text{ kg h}^{-1}$  large-sized haplochromines. In 1977 MV Mdiria made two hauls with 20 mm codend mesh, which contained an average catch of haplochromines of  $540 \text{ kg h}^{-1}$  (Table 1). Nile

perch were also caught in this period (see above). In June 1985, both haplochromines and Nile perch were present in bottom trawl catches with MV Kiboko (Table 1, Fig. 2.6). Large haplochromines were rare. In October 1985 the stock of haplochromines in the 11 – 20 meter deep zone had vanished (Fig. 2.6), while in the shallow water (1-10 m deep) only a fraction of the original stock was still present. In August 1986 catches of haplochromines had been reduced to a few individuals in both depth zones, resulting in weights that are not visible in Fig. 2.6.

In the Kagera area, we found haplochromines at all depth zones in the second quarter of 1985. After 1985, at Chigoga- and Kemono Bay as well as near Bukoba harbour (all < 10 m deep), we found in 3.5 hrs trawling very small quantities (<<1 kg) of haplochromines. In the 10–20 m and 21–48 m zones we fished respectively 16.5 and 299 hrs and hardly caught any haplochromines.

## Discussion

### *The colonisation process*

Around 400 Nile perch from Lake Albert were introduced into Lake Victoria (Gee, 1964; Amaras, 1986; Pringle 2005). Additionally, eight fishes were introduced from Lake Turkana (Gee, 1964; Pringle 2005). Apart from *Lates niloticus*, each of these lakes harbour a deep-water *Lates* species, *L. macrophthalmus* Worthington, 1929 and *L. longispinis* Worthington, 1932 respectively. Allozyme data indicate that Nile perch of Lake Victoria were mainly *Lates niloticus* from Lake Albert, although there were indications for some genetic

contribution of *L. macrophthalmus* (Hauser et al., 1998).

Although the first Nile perches were introduced in 1954, it took till May 1960 before a Nile perch was reported from a catch of a fisherman in Uganda (Gee, 1964). Several others were caught later that year. The eight fishes recorded in 1960 from the northeast corner of the lake, were 28–43 cm long (Hamblyn, 1961). They probably were offspring of those introduced in 1954, as in six years time the introduced individuals would have attained a much greater length (e.g. Hughes, 1992). According to Gee (1964) a breeding population existed in the lake in 1962/63, probably centered in Hannington Bay and down the Buvumu Channel.

According to Pringle (2005) the first Nile perch reported from Tanzanian waters was caught near Mwanza in October 1961. Other reports suggest that Nile perch was landed for the first time from Tanzania waters of the lake in August 1963 at Musoma (Kudhongania & Cordone, 1974a). During a bottom trawl survey in 1969–1970 rarely Nile perch were caught in Tanzanian waters, and only near Musoma on the east side of the lake and near Bukoba on the west side of the lake (Kudhongania & Cordone, 1974a,b). These fishes in Tanzania made up for 0.01 kg h<sup>-1</sup>, while during the same survey 0.48 and 1.12 kg h<sup>-1</sup> was caught respectively in Uganda and Kenya (Kudhongania & Cordone, 1974b).

Already in 1979, approximately 50 kg of Nile perch hr<sup>-1</sup> was caught on average in the Nyanza Gulf. These catches contained all stages from early juveniles to adults. In contrast, in the Mwanza Gulf Nile perch catches above 50 kg h<sup>-1</sup> were not observed

before 1984, and juveniles were first caught in 1985 (Table 1). Up to 1985, all Nile perch found in the Mwanza Gulf apparently had been born elsewhere. The length frequency distribution of Nile perch from trawl catches in 1983 and 1984 (Fig. 2.3) indicates that the strong increase in number of Nile perch in the Mwanza Gulf in 1983-84 was caused by sub-adult fishes. It is most likely that these fishes arrived by immigration. In Ugandan waters and in the Speke Gulf, Nile perch catches around 50 kg h<sup>-1</sup> were observed 1-2 years earlier than in the Mwanza Gulf, and three years later than in the Nyanza Gulf (Table 1). These observations suggest that Nile perch spread from the Nyanza Gulf towards the North and the South. Zaret & Paine (1973) described the spread of the introduced predator *Cichla ocellaris* in Lake Gatun in Panama. They note that “the fish have not diffused haphazardly throughout the lake, but have moved as a wave, with a leading edge composed of sub-adults...”. Though there are many gaps, our data suggest a similar process for Nile perch in Lake Victoria. A similar migration of sub-adults of an introduced predator fish, *Parachanna obscura* (Steindachner, 1879), was noticed in the upper course of the Zambian Congo River. Between 1996 and 1999 a migration from a local nucleus at the Luapula River towards Lake Mweru was observed (PCG, unpublished data).

Preliminary results of a tagging program in the Mwanza region revealed that Nile perch was able to cover 50 km per week (Ligtvoet & Mkumbo, 1990). This is well within the range that Nile perch could cover based on a cruising speed fish of 1-2 body lengths s<sup>-1</sup> (Videler, 1993). This implies that Nile perch was able to cover the

distance from Kenyan waters to the Mwanza Gulf in a few months. However, the Nile perch became abundant in the Nyanza Gulf in Kenya in 1979 it took 4 years before the sub-adult Nile perch “wave” reached the Mwanza Gulf. This might indicate that there was no need for these fishes to migrate at greater speed at that time. Nile perch boomed in the Ugandan and the Tanzanian waters after haplochromines had been depleted in the Nyanza Gulf (Table 1). Therefore, it is possible that Nile perch started to migrate after local depletion of haplochromines.

#### *Decline of haplochromines*

Evidence has been given by Ogutu-Ohwayo (1990b) and by Witte et al. (1992 a,b) that the decline and extinction of several hundreds of haplochromine species was due to predation by Nile perch. Other causes for the decline of the haplochromines were local over-exploitation (Witte & Goudswaard, 1985; Bundy & Pitcher, 1995) and eutrophication, leading to oxygen deficiencies (Hecky, 1993: but see: Witte et al., 2005) and to increased turbidity (Seehausen et al., 1997a).

Exploitation of a virgin stock generally leads to a stock reduction and changes in species composition. Larger species, which mature above the 50% retention size of the net, are generally more sensitive to over-exploitation than small sized species. In Lake Malawi commercial trawl fishery on haplochromine cichlids resulted in a change in dominance from medium and large sized species to small sized species (Turner et al., 1995). The same was observed in the Mwanza Gulf, where the large species had vanished in the catches with the 90 mm codend by 1979 (Fig. 2.2b). The catch per unit of effort (in kg

h<sup>-1</sup> trawling) also declined for the small sized haplochromines. However, for the following reasons, the steep decline in the Mwanza Gulf, after 1984 cannot be attributed to fishing only: (1) After the trawl fishery in the Mwanza Gulf was stopped in 1986, the decline of the haplochromines continued (Table 1); (2) In areas where fishing pressure for haplochromines was low, e.g. Emin Pasha Gulf and Kagera area, they vanished as well (Table 1); (3) In all areas the complete disappearance of the haplochromines was preceded by a strong increase of the Nile perch, thus suggesting a major impact of this predator (Table 1).

With respect to eutrophication, especially increased turbidity may have had a strong impact, as cichlids are highly dependent on vision for feeding and reproduction (Seehausen et al., 1997a, 2003; Seehausen & Van Alphen, 1998, Witte et al., 2000). Because the Nile perch upsurge in Lake Victoria and the increase of eutrophication both occurred in about the same period, it is difficult to establish the relative impact of these phenomena separately (Witte et al., 2005). Nevertheless, as indicated above, predation by Nile perch was a major factor.

#### *Large Nile perch as a pioneer for juvenile Nile perch?*

It is remarkable that after the first release of Nile perch in Lake Victoria it took more than 25 years before a sudden increase of its population took place, resulting in its dominance in the demersal fish stock. The initial abundance of haplochromine cichlids suggests that food cannot have been a limiting factor for the piscivorous Nile perch between its introduction and the

early 1980s. Therefore, we assume that other factors have played a role. An important factor could have been the survival of very young Nile perch and the food abundance for these fishes. Although we have no evidence from stomach contents, it is likely that the abundant haplochromines fed upon eggs and larvae of Nile perch, whenever available. Moreover, the haplochromines were probably competing with juvenile Nile perch for zooplankton and insect larvae. During the colonisation process the adult and sub-adult Nile perch fed heavily upon haplochromine cichlids (Hughes, 1986; Ogutu-Ohwayo, 1990a,b; Ligtvoet et al., 1990) and reduced their numbers to extremely low levels, thus enhancing the chance of survival of eggs and larvae of Nile perch. Further, it has been suggested that the reduction of haplochromine cichlids also reduced the predation on juvenile shrimps, *Caridina nilotica* (Roux, 1833) (Chapter 5 – Goudswaard et al, 2006). Apart from zooplankton and insect larvae, shrimp larvae also appeared to be an important food item for small (<10 cm) Nile perch (Katunzi et al., 2006; Chapter 5 – Goudswaard et al 2006). Both shrimps and insect larvae increased after the disappearance of the haplochromines (Kaufman, 1992; Mbahinzireki, 1992; Goldschmidt et al., 1993; Goudswaard et al 2006), which were their predators. In this situation adult Nile perch facilitated the food availability for juvenile Nile perch by eradicating the former competitors of their juveniles.

If the foregoing is correct, than Nile perch initially could have been successful in reproduction only at places where the haplochromine stock was reduced. Before the Nile perch upsurge this must

have been an area where the reduction of haplochromines was caused by other factors than predation by Nile perch. The heavily exploited Nyanza Gulf in Kenya might have acted as such a place, as already in the early 1970s over-exploitation of haplochromines was reported for this area (Marten, 1979).

#### *Nile perch after the boom*

After the disappearance of the haplochromines and the establishment of a large stock of shrimps, the Nile perch became a resident species of which successive year classes were present. Juvenile Nile perches became one of the main food sources of adult Nile perch > 50 cm (Hughes, 1986, 1992; Ogari & Dadzie, 1988; Ogutu-Ohwayo, 1990b; Mkumbo & Ligtoet, 1992; Katunzi et al, 2006). In the Speke Gulf the amount of large Nile perch in trawl catches declined (Fig. 2.5a). As Nile perch fishery mainly aimed at large fishes, fishing may have caused this reduction. It has been observed in Kenyan waters that size at 50% maturity has declined from 102 cm for females and 74 cm for males before 1986 (Asila & Ogari, 1987) to 55 cm for males and 70 cm for females around 1990 (Ogari & Asila, 1992).

The explanation of the simultaneous increase of small (<35 cm) individuals is more complex. It might be the combined result of: (1) Growth of the recruits that were born in the area after the initial invasion of the sub-adults; (2) A relatively high predation pressure on juvenile Nile perch by adult Nile perch in the early years when the densities of large Nile perch were still high.

## Conclusions

Summarized, our data suggest the following steps in the colonization process of Nile perch in Lake Victoria. (1) Initially, overfishing of haplochromines in the Nyanza Gulf facilitated a local recruitment of juvenile Nile perch due to a decrease of predation by and competition with haplochromines. (2) Colonisation of other areas in the lake took place at different moments. In each of these areas the first step in the process comprised the invasion of sub-adults from neighboring areas, where haplochromines had been depleted. (3) Subsequently, the local haplochromine stock vanished, and both juvenile Nile perch and juvenile shrimps had a higher survival rate than before. (4) As a consequence a strong recruitment of Nile perch occurred in the area. Thus, the pioneering sub-adult Nile perch created, by eradication of the haplochromines, a changed species composition in favour of juvenile Nile perch.

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