

## ENDEMIC FISH FROM THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

The United Nations has proclaimed May 22 The International Day for Biological Diversity to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. This day was chosen to commemorate the adoption of the final text of the Convention on Biological Diversity on 22 May 1992.

Portugal has a relevant role in the preservation of global diversity since the Iberian Peninsula is a hotspot of biodiversity\*, holding a high number of endemics, i.e. species that do not occur anywhere else. This high level of endemics is the result of several million of geographic isolation by the Pyrenees. In several occasions and for long periods of time, glaciers covered most Europe inducing massive extinctions, with the exception of the southern peninsulas where high levels of biodiversity have been preserved.

The MUHNAC celebrates May by choosing as the objects of the month specimens of freshwater fish. This group of animals presents a high rate of endemics - of 77 species native to the Iberian Peninsula 39 are endemic. Ten species only occur in the Portuguese watercourses and therefore merit special attention.

According to the Portuguese Vertebrate Red Data Book, the freshwater fishes are the group of animals most at risk, with 63 % of the species considered threatened. Habitat degradation is a major threat, caused mainly by the construction of dams, water pollution, sand extraction and normalization of river banks. But the proliferation of exotic species (i.e. from other parts of the world) is perhaps the most difficult threat to control.

We have chosen to show you 6 fish that occur in Portuguese rivers, representing 6 endemic genera – the jarabugo (genus *Anaecypris*), the Iberian barbels (genus *Luciobarbus*), the Iberian chubs (genus *Squalius*), the nases (genus *Pseudochondrostoma*), the arched-mouth-nases (genus *Iberochondrostoma*) and the ruivacos (genus *Achondrostoma*).

\* Biodiversity hotspots are zones of high biodiversity, showing high levels of endemics. There are 34 hotspots that cover 1,4% of total Earth surface and hold 60% of the World's biological patrimony.

