NEW HOSTS AND RECORDS OF THE ALIEN ASIAN ANCHOR WORM *LERNAEA CYPRINACEA* LINNAEUS, 1758 (CRUSTACEA: COPEPODA) IN MOROCCO

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The issue of biological invasions represents a significant global challenge, with invasive species causing considerable losses of biodiversity and disruption to the functioning of ecosystems. Furthermore, alien species can facilitate the introduction of alien and invasive parasites, which can lead to the emergence of novel host-parasite relationships and, consequently, the alteration of the structure of native communities. In this paper, we provide the first record of the Asian anchor worm *Lernaea cyprinacea* Linnaeus, 1758, in northern Morocco, affecting two endemic freshwater fish species i.e. the Moroccan barb *Carasobarbus fritschii* Günther, 1874, and the Moroccan spiny loach *Cobitis maroccana* Pellegrin, 1929. The infected fishes were found at two different locations in the Sebou stem, demonstrating the gradual spread of the parasitic copepod through the country's northern watersheds. The Asian anchor worm represents an additional threat to these vulnerable fish species, increasing their vulnerability to predation and other environmental and anthropogenic stresses.

Keywords: Anchor worm, alien species, endemic species, co-invasion, new records, North Africa, Sebou River Basin.

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