

THE FIRST DOCUMENTED RECORD OF WILD-ESTABLISHED ORNAMENTAL KOI CARP MORPHOLOGICALLY CONSISTENT WITH *CYPRINUS RUBROFUSCUS* LACEPÈDE, 1803 (CYPRINIDAE, ACTINOPTERYGII) FROM MOROCCO AND NORTH AFRICA

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Human activities, particularly the aquarium trade, are increasingly facilitating the introduction of exotic aquatic species beyond their natural biogeographical ranges, posing major threats to freshwater biodiversity worldwide. This study reports, for the first time, the establishment of a feral population of koi carp (*Cyprinus rubrofasciatus*) in Morocco and, more broadly, in North Africa. The population was discovered in the Ain Smen dam, located within the Sebou basin. Seven specimens displaying different colour morphotypes were collected and identified based on diagnostic morphological characters, notably the number of dorsal fin rays and lateral line scales. Field investigations revealed that the introduction was intentional and linked to ornamental fish farming for commercial purposes. This new record increases the number of confirmed exotic freshwater fish species in Morocco to 25 species belonging to eight families, representing approximately 37.3% of the national ichthyofauna. Among these, five species are associated with the aquarium and ornamental fish trade. Our findings highlight the growing role of the ornamental fish trade as an emerging pathway for biological invasions in Moroccan freshwaters and emphasise the urgent need for strengthened monitoring programmes, public awareness initiatives, and stricter regulations governing the importation, breeding, and trade of ornamental species in order to protect Morocco's endemic aquatic biodiversity.

Keywords: Alien species, invasive species, aquarium trade, ornamental fish, new records, North Africa.
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