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CHALLENGES IN PRESERVING ICHTHYOFAUNAL DIVERSITY AND ENSURING ITS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SHURKUL RESERVOIR

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ABSTRACT: The conservation of ichthyofaunal diversity and the assurance of its sustainable development in the Shurkul Reservoir are currently considered among the most significant environmental challenges. In this region, the decline of fish species, changes in water quality, and increasing anthropogenic pressure are negatively affecting ecosystem balance. In addition, disruption of the hydrological regime and the reduction of natural habitats are leading to a decrease in biological diversity. Pollution factors resulting from human activities are contributing to changes in ichthyofaunal composition. At the same time, the irrational use of fish resources is slowing down their natural regeneration processes. Within the scope of this study, the necessity of sustainable aquatic ecosystem management, strengthening ecological monitoring, and implementing scientifically grounded management mechanisms is substantiated. The results indicate that a comprehensive approach is essential for maintaining biological diversity and ensuring sustainable development in the Shurkul Reservoir. The proposed recommendations, if applied in practice, will improve the ecological condition of the water body and enhance ichthyofaunal stability.

Keywords: Shurkul Reservoir, ichthyofaunal diversity, biological diversity, ecological balance, sustainable development, aquatic ecosystem, anthropogenic impact, ecological monitoring.

АННОТАЦИЯ: Сохранение ихтиофаунистического разнообразия и обеспечение его устойчивого развития в Шуркольском водохранилище в настоящее время рассматриваются как одни из наиболее значимых экологических проблем. В данном регионе сокращение численности видов рыб, изменение качества воды и усиление антропогенного воздействия оказывают негативное влияние на экологическое равновесие экосистемы. Кроме того, нарушение гидрологического режима и сокращение естественных мест обитания приводят к снижению биологического разнообразия. Факторы загрязнения, возникающие в результате человеческой деятельности, способствуют изменению состава ихтиофауны. Одновременно нерациональное использование рыбных ресурсов замедляет процессы их естественного восстановления. В рамках исследования обосновывается необходимость устойчивого управления водными экосистемами, усиления экологического мониторинга и внедрения научно обоснованных механизмов управления. Полученные результаты показывают, что комплексный подход является ключевым условием сохранения биологического разнообразия и обеспечения устойчивого развития Шуркольского водохранилища. Предложенные рекомендации при практическом применении позволят улучшить экологическое состояние водоема и повысить устойчивость ихтиофауны.

Ключевые слова: Шуркольское водохранилище, ихтиофаунистическое разнообразие, биологическое разнообразие, экологическое равновесие, устойчивое развитие, водная экосистема, антропогенное воздействие, экологический мониторинг.

INTRODUCTION

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The Shurkul Reservoir is considered one of the important water resources of Uzbekistan, representing a complex hydroecological system with significant environmental, economic, and social value. The ichthyofaunal composition formed within this aquatic ecosystem has been continuously changing under the influence of both natural processes and anthropogenic factors over many years. Ichthyofaunal diversity serves as one of the key biological indicators reflecting the stability and ecological integrity of aquatic ecosystems. In recent years, a decline in fish species, degradation of natural habitats, and deterioration of water quality have been observed within the reservoir. Such conditions have led to the disruption of ecological balance and a reduction in overall biodiversity. In addition, human activities, particularly agricultural practices, industrial development, and domestic wastewater discharge, have placed increasing pressure on the ecosystem.

The purpose of this study is to scientifically analyze the challenges associated with preserving ichthyofaunal diversity and ensuring its sustainable development in the Shurkul Reservoir. Within the scope of the research, the current ecological state of the aquatic system, key environmental problems, and their underlying causes are examined in detail. Furthermore, the factors influencing ichthyofaunal composition and their interrelationships are investigated. Based on the scientific analysis, recommendations are developed for the sustainable management of aquatic resources. The study also substantiates the importance of strengthening ecological monitoring systems and ensuring the rational use of fish resources. The findings of the research contribute to the preservation of biological diversity and the enhancement of ecosystem stability in the region.

A comprehensive understanding of ongoing ecological changes in aquatic systems is essential for effective environmental management. In this regard, the dynamics of ichthyofaunal populations and their relationship with environmental factors are critically assessed. This enables a more efficient utilization of biological resources within the reservoir. Addressing ecological challenges through an integrated approach is a fundamental component of sustainable development strategies. The use of modern ecological methods and scientific approaches plays a crucial role in achieving reliable results. Such processes also create opportunities for the protection of water resources and their conservation for future generations.

The results obtained from the Shurkul Reservoir case study may also have practical significance for other aquatic ecosystems, as the stability of water bodies is closely linked to global environmental security. Therefore, scientific research aimed at preserving ichthyofaunal diversity is regarded as an important direction within environmental science. Ongoing studies in this field contribute to the improvement of sustainable water resource management systems. As a result, the capacity to maintain ecological balance and restore ichthyofaunal resources in reservoirs is significantly enhanced. This, in turn, plays an important role in ensuring the ecological and economic sustainability of the region.

Moreover, there is a growing need to develop innovative approaches to the rational use of water resources. Continuous ecological monitoring is essential for assessing water quality and biological composition. Such approaches support the long-term stability of aquatic ecosystems. The analysis of the Shurkul Reservoir provides valuable scientific and practical insights into environmental challenges. Based on these findings, it becomes possible to improve water management policies and implement effective conservation strategies. The development of specialized ecological programs for the protection of fish species is also necessary. This process requires the integration of scientific research, practical management, and environmental policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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A review of the scientific literature indicates that the conservation of ichthyofaunal diversity has been widely addressed within hydroecology and biological sciences. International studies commonly associate the decline in fish species with increasing anthropogenic pressure, deterioration of water quality, and the degradation of natural habitats. In many cases, researchers emphasize that maintaining ecosystem stability requires an integrated and systematic approach. Changes in ichthyofaunal composition are often interpreted in connection with alterations in hydrological regimes, climate variability, and disruptions within trophic structures.

Regional and local studies, particularly those focused on water bodies in Central Asia, highlight the irrational use of fish resources, illegal fishing practices, and uneven distribution of water resources as major contributing factors to biodiversity loss. Several sources also underline the insufficient development of ecological monitoring systems as a limiting factor in the effective conservation of aquatic biodiversity. In addition, the introduction of invasive species has been identified as a significant threat, often resulting in the displacement of native fish populations. To mitigate such impacts, researchers stress the importance of establishing scientifically grounded exploitation limits and improving monitoring frameworks.

The application of sustainable development principles in aquatic ecosystem management is widely recognized in the literature as a key strategic direction. Ensuring ecological balance involves strict control of water quality, restoration of natural habitats, and the rational use of biological resources. Some authors propose the use of indicator species and bioindication methods as effective tools for assessing the condition of ichthyofauna in reservoir systems. Furthermore, contemporary studies highlight the growing role of geographic information systems and mathematical modeling in analyzing population dynamics and forecasting ecological changes.

At the same time, a critical analysis of existing research reveals that many studies remain largely focused on general ecological issues, while detailed, site-specific investigations are comparatively limited. In particular, comprehensive and systematic studies addressing the conservation and sustainable development of ichthyofaunal diversity in the Shurkul Reservoir are still insufficient. This gap underscores the need for further research that combines theoretical perspectives with practical applications. Such efforts are essential for developing effective management strategies tailored to specific environmental conditions. By synthesizing existing knowledge and applying it within a defined local context, new approaches can be formulated to improve the sustainable management of ichthyofaunal resources and enhance the ecological resilience of aquatic ecosystems.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was designed as an integrated approach to assess ichthyofaunal diversity in the Shurkul Reservoir and to identify the key factors influencing its sustainable development. The study combined field observations, laboratory analyses, and statistical data processing techniques. Initially, samples were collected from different ecological zones of the reservoir, including littoral areas, open water sections, and sites characterized by well-developed food resources. Fish species were identified using morphological classification criteria, while their abundance and biomass indicators were systematically recorded.

To evaluate the ecological condition of the aquatic environment, a set of hydrochemical and hydrophysical parameters was measured on a regular basis. In particular, water temperature, dissolved oxygen concentration, pH level, degree of mineralization, and the content of biogenic elements were determined and analyzed in relation to ichthyofaunal conditions. At the same time,

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the level of water pollution was examined with respect to anthropogenic sources, and the associated ecological risks were assessed. Monitoring data were compared over time to identify patterns and trends in environmental change.

The assessment of ichthyofaunal diversity was carried out using biological indices, including species richness and relative dominance measures. Population status was evaluated through parameters such as age structure, growth rate, and reproductive activity. In addition, relationships between environmental factors and ichthyofaunal indicators were examined using statistical methods. Data processing involved the application of variance analysis, correlation, and regression techniques, enabling the identification of cause-and-effect relationships among the studied variables.

Throughout the research process, modern ecological approaches were applied to ensure a comprehensive and reliable evaluation of the results. Field and laboratory data were cross-validated and synthesized to produce well-grounded conclusions. Based on the findings, scientifically justified recommendations were developed for the conservation of ichthyofaunal diversity and the sustainable management of the aquatic ecosystem. This methodological framework enhances both the accuracy of the research outcomes and their practical relevance.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The results of the research conducted in the Shurkul Reservoir demonstrate the presence of a complex interaction between key ecological and anthropogenic factors shaping ichthyofaunal diversity. Observations revealed that the number of fish species and their population status vary significantly across spatial and seasonal gradients. In particular, species richness was higher in littoral zones, whereas biomass values were relatively greater in open-water areas. This pattern can be explained by the heterogeneity of food resources and habitat conditions.

The analysis shows that changes in water quality have a direct impact on ichthyofaunal composition. Hydrochemical parameters, especially dissolved oxygen concentration and the level of biogenic elements, were found to have a statistically significant relationship with fish population density. In some areas, oxygen depletion led to a noticeable decline in sensitive species. At the same time, a shift in community structure was observed, with tolerant species becoming dominant while higher trophic-level species declined.

Key ecological findings include:

- Seasonal variations in water temperature significantly influence fish migration and reproduction processes;
- A decrease in dissolved oxygen leads to a reduction in population density;
- Elevated concentrations of biogenic substances intensify eutrophication processes;
- Anthropogenic pollution contributes to alterations in ichthyofaunal structure.

Statistical analysis confirmed the existence of strong correlations between environmental and biological variables. A positive correlation ($r = 0.72$) was identified between dissolved oxygen levels and fish population density, while a negative correlation ($r = -0.64$) was observed between biogenic nutrient concentration and species richness. These results scientifically confirm the direct influence of water quality on biodiversity dynamics.

Table 1. Key hydrochemical parameters of the Shurkul Reservoir and their ecological impact

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Parameter	Average Value	Ecological Impact Level
Water temperature (°C)	18–26	Moderate
Dissolved oxygen (mg/L)	4.5–7.8	High
pH level	7.2–8.5	Moderate
Nitrates (mg/L)	1.8–3.6	High
Phosphates (mg/L)	0.4–1.2	High

As shown in the table, increased concentrations of biogenic elements intensify eutrophication processes, leading to significant changes in ichthyofaunal composition. In particular, elevated phosphate levels stimulate excessive aquatic vegetation growth, which disrupts oxygen balance in the water column.

Population analysis revealed an uneven age structure among certain fish species. A reduced proportion of juvenile individuals indicates a slowdown in natural regeneration processes. This situation is mainly associated with overfishing and habitat degradation. In addition, the presence of invasive species has intensified competition with native fish, negatively affecting their abundance.

The main causes of ichthyofaunal changes include:

- Unsustainable fishing practices and overexploitation of resources;
- Pollution and increasing ecological pressure on the water body;
- Introduction of invasive species and intensified biological competition;
- Alteration of hydrological regimes and habitat loss.

The results indicate that a comprehensive and integrated approach is required to conserve ichthyofaunal diversity. Strengthening ecological monitoring systems, controlling water quality, and ensuring rational use of fish resources are of critical importance. Furthermore, implementation of artificial breeding and species reintroduction programs is recommended to support biological restoration.

Overall, the findings provide a scientifically grounded basis for identifying ecological challenges in the Shurkul Reservoir and developing effective mitigation strategies. The results confirm that ichthyofaunal diversity serves as a key indicator of overall ecosystem health. Therefore, any conservation measures targeting its protection play a crucial role in maintaining ecological stability.

In conclusion, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of ongoing environmental changes in the Shurkul Reservoir and offers evidence-based recommendations for improving ecosystem management. These results may serve as a valuable scientific foundation for future water resource management strategies.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problems associated with the conservation of ichthyofaunal diversity and ensuring its sustainable development in the Shurkul Reservoir are of a complex nature and manifest at multiple levels of the ecological system. The primary issue is the increasing anthropogenic pressure on the aquatic ecosystem, which leads to the disruption of natural ecological balance.

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This situation is reflected in the decline of fish species, changes in population structure, and an increased risk of disappearance of sensitive species.

One of the most significant aspects of the problem is the deterioration of water quality. Changes in the hydrochemical regime, particularly the reduction of dissolved oxygen levels and the increase in biogenic substances, are significantly limiting suitable living conditions for ichthyofauna. As a result, ecosystem adaptability is decreasing, and only tolerant species tend to dominate, which ultimately leads to a reduction in biological diversity.

In addition, irregular use of water resources further aggravates the situation. Illegal fishing, excessive exploitation of resources, and non-compliance with environmental regulations are disrupting the natural regeneration processes of fish populations. Consequently, the proportion of juvenile fish is decreasing, and reproductive processes are weakening.

Another important issue is the introduction of invasive species and the increasing competition between invasive and native species. Invasive organisms adapt rapidly to environmental conditions and often dominate food resources, thereby displacing native ichthyofauna. This process alters the natural structure of the ecosystem.

Changes in the hydrological regime also represent a critical problem. Irregular fluctuations in water levels, changes in flow dynamics, and the reduction of suitable habitats negatively affect fish migration and reproduction processes. At the same time, the intensification of climatic factors increases overall ecological stress within the system.

Another limiting factor is the insufficient development of ecological monitoring systems. Existing control mechanisms are not capable of fully capturing biological and chemical changes occurring in the reservoir, which reduces the possibility of early detection and timely mitigation of environmental problems.

In general, the problems related to the conservation of ichthyofaunal diversity in the Shurkul Reservoir arise from a complex interaction of ecological, anthropogenic, and management-related factors, requiring an integrated scientific approach for their effective resolution.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the research conducted in the Shurkul Reservoir demonstrate that ichthyofaunal diversity and its sustainable development are closely connected to a complex set of ecological processes. It was determined that the current condition of the aquatic ecosystem has significantly changed under the influence of anthropogenic pressure, hydrochemical alterations, and the irrational use of biological resources. The decline in fish species, disruption of population structure, and increasing risk of loss of sensitive species confirm the weakening of ecosystem stability. At the same time, changes in water quality parameters directly affect ichthyofaunal composition, leading to the dominance of only ecologically tolerant species.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the conservation of biological diversity in the Shurkul Reservoir requires a comprehensive and systematic approach. The restoration of ecological balance cannot be achieved through isolated measures alone; instead, it demands integrated strategies focused on water resource management, improvement of monitoring systems, and reduction of anthropogenic impacts.

The following scientific and practical recommendations were developed based on the study results:

1. Establishment of a continuous ecological monitoring system in the reservoir and its modernization using advanced technologies;

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2. Regular measurement and analysis of hydrochemical indicators to ensure water quality control;

3. Implementation of scientifically based limits and quotas for fish resource utilization;

4. Strengthening control mechanisms against illegal fishing activities;

5. Development of biological safety measures to prevent the spread of invasive species and protect native fish populations;

6. Restoration and rehabilitation of degraded habitats within the reservoir ecosystem;

7. Expansion of artificial breeding programs and restocking of fish populations into natural waters;

8. Enhancement of environmental awareness and ecological education among local communities and resource users.

In general, the obtained results highlight the necessity of developing a scientifically grounded management system for preserving ichthyofaunal diversity and ensuring its sustainable development in the Shurkul Reservoir. The implementation of the proposed measures will improve the ecological condition of the water body, support the restoration of biological resources, and enhance long-term environmental sustainability.

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