

WHAT IS THIS FISH?

The World's Giant, Endangered Migratory Fish



Mekong giant catfish

One of the largest and most iconic fish of Southeast Asia, the Mekong giant catfish is symbolic of the health of the Mekong River. A Mekong River endemic, the huge fish grows to 10 feet and 650 pounds. It makes long distance migrations out of the Tonle Sap Lake and into the mainstream Cambodian Mekong. Genetic evidence suggests that the Mekong giant catfish also migrates from Cambodia into Lao PDR and Thailand, a journey of almost 1000 miles.



Taimen

Or the giant Eurasian trout, isn't known for long distance migrations, and yet populations of taimen decline in rivers that are fragmented or dammed. Taimen seem to do best in free flowing rivers. Research from Mongolia shows that taimen are capable of movements of over 100 miles and often return to the same sites year after year. While more study is needed, it's clear that taimen do best in healthy rivers with clean water and abundant prey.



White sturgeon

Are found from California to Alaska. Most populations are anadromous, migrating from fresh water to the sea and back again to complete their life cycle. White sturgeon populations are healthiest in undammed stretches of the Columbia and Sacramento Rivers and largely free flowing sections like the Fraser.



Freshwater sawfish

Sawfish get their name from their saw-like snout. Freshwater sawfish spend the early part of their life in fresh water, then move into coastal waters as they mature. Habitat degradation, as well as dams and overfishing have taken their toll on the freshwater sawfish which is now listed as Critically Endangered.



Mississippi paddlefish

A unique fish with a long paddle-like snout, is found in the Mississippi River basin in the central United States. Capable of reaching lengths of over 6 feet and weights in excess of 200 pounds the American paddlefish is one of the largest freshwater fish in North America. Healthy populations are found in the free flowing sections of the upper Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers, where paddlefish migrate from lakes and reservoirs to rivers to find the conditions that they need to spawn successfully.



Bull shark

Believe it or not there are several species of sharks that migrate between fresh and salt water. The most common, and well known, is the bull shark, that has been found hundreds of miles up the Amazon, Mississippi, and Zambezi Rivers. Less well known, and much rarer, are the freshwater sharks of northern Australia - namely the speartooth and northern river sharks. These two species occur in fresh and brackish water, especially when young. Adults seem to move back to coastal areas to breed and pup.



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Golden dorado

With its striking appearance, reputation as an excellent sport fish, and status as an important commercial species, the golden dorado is one of the most famous fish in South America. Studies have shown that the golden dorado is also a highly migratory species, moving hundreds of miles along the Parana River in Argentina and Uruguay. Like many migratory species, the dorado crosses international borders - and while it doesn't need a passport, the transboundary nature of its life cycle can make management more difficult.



Longfin eel

Is New Zealand's largest and longest lived freshwater fish, capable of living over 100 years of age and reaching lengths of over 7 feet. The longfin eel makes one of the most impressive migrations of any animal: born in the open ocean the young eels find their way to freshwater rivers and streams, reside in fresh water their entire lives, then migrate back to the ocean at the end of their lives to spawn. These migrations can span thousands of miles and take years.



Chinese sturgeon

Were once a familiar sight in the Yangtze River. A huge fish, capable of growing to over 12 feet in length and 1000 pounds, the massive fish was also a proficient traveler, migrating from the ocean to fresh water to spawn. Dam building in the Yangtze River blocked access to upstream spawning grounds and over the last 30 to 40 years the Chinese sturgeon population has declined dramatically. The sturgeon's migratory cousin, the Chinese paddlefish, may already be extinct.



Piraiba

Is one of South America's largest freshwater fish. It can grow to over 8 feet in length and weigh more than 300 pounds. It makes epic migrations up and down the Amazon - from the headwaters in Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru down to the Amazon estuary in Brazil. It's one of many commercially important Amazon catfish that make long distance migrations throughout the basin.



Giant Freshwater Stingray

The giant freshwater stingray Himantura polylepis is one of the world's largest freshwater fish. It occurs in large rivers of Southeast Asia, including the Mekong, Chao Phraya, Banpakong, and Maeklong Rivers. The migratory behavior of the giant freshwater stingray is not well understood - it occurs over 700km up the Mekong River, and in the Chao Phraya River as far upstream as central Thailand but is also found in estuaries and river deltas. Movement between marine and fresh water is not thought to be a necessary stage of its life history but pregnant females are common in the brackish water of the lower Maeklong River and the area may be a pupping ground. The species is listed as Endangered by IUCN.



Chinook salmon

Is the largest species of Pacific salmon, growing to almost 5 feet in length and weighing over 100 pounds. Famous for epic migrations all along the Pacific coast of North America, the Chinook salmon travels as far inland as Idaho, Montana, and the interior of Alaska, sometimes spawns at elevations higher than 6000 feet.

