

SHOAL

MID-YEAR REPORT
January - June 2021

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FIVE KEY HIGHLIGHTS

SEARCH FOR THE LOST FISHES

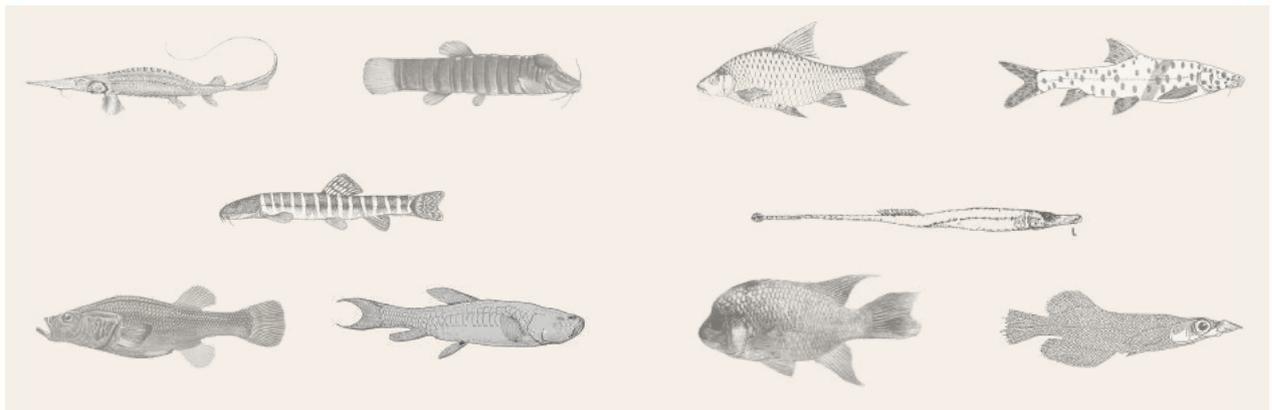
After nine months of preparation, we proudly launched our flagship campaign 'Search for the Lost Fishes' with the release of our initial Top 10 Most Wanted fish species in June 2021.

This exciting campaign will see us working with local partners around the world to search for fish species that haven't been formally recorded in over a decade, but have not been declared Extinct by the IUCN Red List.

Each of the species has fascinating stories to tell, and there is good reason to believe each still survives, ready to be found.

See 'Conservation programme' to learn more, or head to:

shoalconservation.org/search-for-lost-fishes/



To further engage a wider audience, we launched the Lost Fishes Art Challenge. This has seen hundreds of entries from around the world. Winners will become Shoal's 'oh-fish-al' illustrator for the species they entered, and will have their work exhibited at an exhibition at Oxford University's Museum of Natural History in late October and potentially other venues in 2022.

Learn more at: shoalconservation.org/the-lost-fishes-art-challenge/



SULAWESI'S ANCIENT LAKES



© Yayasan Bumi Sawerigading

Our partners Yayasan Bumi Sawerigading (YBS) in Sulawesi, Indonesia (together with the IUCN Freshwater Biodiversity Unit), with support from Synchronicity Earth and the Ernest Kleinwort Foundation continue to make fantastic progress on their vital work to restore the endemic fauna of Lake Mahalona.

A team of local fishermen have been undertaking daily catches at key points around the lake, removing more than 20,000 individual fish of the four main invasive fishes. A full biological assessment will be undertaken in August to assess any detectable impact of this initial pilot removal. Although the YBS team have been hampered by the strict lockdown enforcements related to COVID-19, the work has been continued by the local villagers.

Learn more: shoalconservation.org/project/wallaces-dreamponds/

VIETNAM

In January, initial contact was made with a team of ichthyologists in Vietnam to begin vital work on the conservation of the incredible, often highly endemic and threatened freshwater fishes of Vietnam (linked to our support for the IUCN ASAP – see 'Development of Southeast Asia programme' below). Activities are now underway focusing on the Annamite Barb (as one of the lost fishes), and several endemic *Sewellia* species, and in June, the Fishmongers Company kindly provided a grant for a team to undertake surveys of two unique coastal arid habitat protected areas in southern Vietnam. Activities are now underway to partner with the leading freshwater conservation institute in Vietnam in order to develop the programme further.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW ADVISORS

We have finalised our initial group of advisors for 2021-22, with a total of 22 experts who will provide us with advice and support on a diverse range of topics, from technical to strategy, from communications expertise to engaging communities such as the home aquaria hobby and anglers. Each will be an invaluable ally in ensuring our decisions are always made on the basis of what is likely to be most effective for the conservation of threatened freshwater species around the world.



Meet the advisors: shoalconservation.org/advisors/

NEW STRATEGIC PARTNER: GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

In January, we were very pleased to announce a formal partnership with the Global Environment Centre (GEC) in Malaysia, primarily to help us with our work to save the fishes of Southeast Asia's peat swamps but also all our activities in Malaysia. The GEC is the leading NGO on peat swamp conservation in Southeast Asia and were one of the hosts and leading organisations that worked with Shoal and other organisations to create the draft action plan for peat swamp fishes in Malaysia. We are presently finalising details for project activities in four states in Malaysia for the top three priorities listed in the action plan.



CONSERVATION ACTION

SEARCH FOR THE LOST FISHES

Our Top 10 Most Wanted list includes species from countries as far flung as Peru, Madagascar and Papua New Guinea. From the highest lake in the world – Lake Titicaca – to a subterranean cave in Iraq, from deep in the jungle to the Upper Tigris River in Turkey, the species span cultures and ecosystems.

And each species has fascinating stories to tell. For instance, the Syr Darya shovelnose sturgeon, with its impressive tail filament – nearly half its total length – suffered catastrophic population collapse after the Aral Sea disaster. It has not been recorded since the 1960s, yet scientists are confident it is still out there, albeit in a fraction of its former numbers, still swimming in the Syr Darya River.

And the fat catfish of Colombia: a bizarre looking creature that looks like nothing else on the planet. It has rings of adipose tissue surrounding it, making it look like the aquatic version of the Michelin Man! Nobody to date knows why it has a body like this. We are excited to be launching an initial expedition in November this year to start the process of trying to find it, and answer the question that has been baffling scientists for decades: why is it so fat?



© Dr Ian Harrison

Left: A 1999 expedition to Lake Tota to search for the fat catfish.

The fish was not found, and the team had to leave Colombia early, due to potential terrorist activity in the area.

Dr Ian Harrison - a Shoal advisor - was on this trip. He is offering advice and support for the upcoming expedition.

DEVELOPMENT OF MEXICO PROGRAMME

Mexican goodeids – or splitfins – are one of the most popular groups of fish in the aquaria trade and yet they are the most endangered group of fish in the world. These tiny fish live in the small pockets of water in some of the driest of places on Earth, including Death Valley.

We have developed a unique project that will bring together well organised and passionate ex situ breeders (at home and in public aquaria) with simple, direct action on the ground with Mexican experts and landowners. The primary objective is to restore and create new habitat for the blackspot goodeid *Allotoca maculata* that is free from pollution and invasive species. The team will also work closely with the Goodeid Working Group to investigate possibilities of releasing captive bred fish into this new habitat.



© Wolfgang Gessl

DEVELOPMENT OF LAKE TANGANYIKA PROGRAMME

Situated on the western shore of Lake Tanganyika, this exciting Shoal project focuses on the conservation of the highly threatened fish, particularly cichlids, of the lake. It is intimately linked to the home aquaria fish trade and will support sustainable livelihoods for the local villagers in an area recognised as a potential freshwater Key Biodiversity Area.

The project will focus on seven species of cichlid fish that have been recorded as declining due to overharvesting, each of which face extinction if no action is taken.

Shoal will support village development alongside local villagers, create a new protected area on Nkwonde Island for cichlid research and study of sustainable harvesting practices, and help develop the Lake Tanganyika Cichlid Rescue Centre for ex situ breeding conservation and support of sustainable supplies to the aquarium trade.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAMME

Southeast Asia is considered the region with the highest number of species facing immediate extinction, and is therefore one of the priority Shoal regions. Shoal will work on priorities in the region but will primarily focus on supporting the IUCN SSC Asian Species Action Partnership (ASAP) in their efforts to address the extinction risk facing the most threatened land and freshwater vertebrates found there.

In 2019, Shoal teamed up with the IUCN ASAP programme - based in Singapore and hosted by Mandai Nature - to develop an action plan for the 92 ASAP listed freshwater fishes. This is the largest group, by far, of the ASAP species. Development of the action plan has been slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic but the first draft of the plan is near to completion. Shoal has already begun action for some of the priorities that have emerged through this process, including the work on peatswamp fishes in Malaysia and Indonesia, two Critically Endangered endemic *Clarias* species in Malaysia, and species of Mekong river giants.



Parosphromenus harveyi
Courtesy of Martin Fischer, via
Wikimedia



A Malaysian peatswamp habitat
Courtesy of Christian Hinz, via
Wikimedia

INSPIRE

After escalating and accelerating conservation action, the second primary objective of Shoal is to raise awareness of freshwater species conservation.

COORDINATION OF THE INSPIRE CAMPAIGN

Throughout 2021, Shoal has begun to help coordinate an alliance of freshwater organisations to collaborate on a campaign to help bring the wonders of freshwater into mainstream culture. Labelled with a working title as the INSPIRE campaign, it was born from an acknowledgement and consensus among the alliance that, for lasting positive change to be made, there needs to be more mainstream coverage of the freshwater biodiversity crisis, and a broader understanding of it from the public.

Shoal and our partners have identified that freshwater needs its 'Blue Planet' moment, or 'Jacques Cousteau' ambassador who can uncover the wonders of freshwater to a broader audience. We stand a much better chance of achieving this if we work closely in an alliance, and so INSPIRE was developed.

We have established the group, and will continue to collaborate to better promote the importance and marvels of freshwater biodiversity.

APPEARANCE ON PODCASTS

The Shoal team have appeared on a couple of podcasts this year, where they discussed the freshwater biodiversity crisis and what Shoal is doing to address the challenges and conserve the planet's most threatened freshwater species. Both podcasts were an opportunity to speak in depth about the Forgotten Fishes report that was released in February. The report was released by WWF alongside Shoal and 15 other leading conservation organisations, and calls for governments to commit to an Emergency Recovery Plan for global freshwater biodiversity.



Executive director Mike Baltzer appeared on Dr Hayley Adams' Conservation Without Borders podcast in March. You can take a listen here: apple.co/3z6CJB7

And communications and engagement lead Michael Edmondstone had a chat with Allan Archer on Allan's talk:Wildlife platform. Have a watch here: bit.ly/2Xf2LFw

INTERZOO

In June, Shoal was invited to participate in Interzoo digital 2021, the digital version (due to COVID-19) of Europe's largest pet trade fair. This provided an excellent platform for Shoal to further build its relationship and reputation with the home aquarium hobby. Mike Baltzer was part of a high-level panel discussing the future of wild harvested fishes where he emphasised the importance of linking any wild harvest to the highest quality conservation action.



Interzoo

EARNED MEDIA PROMOTION

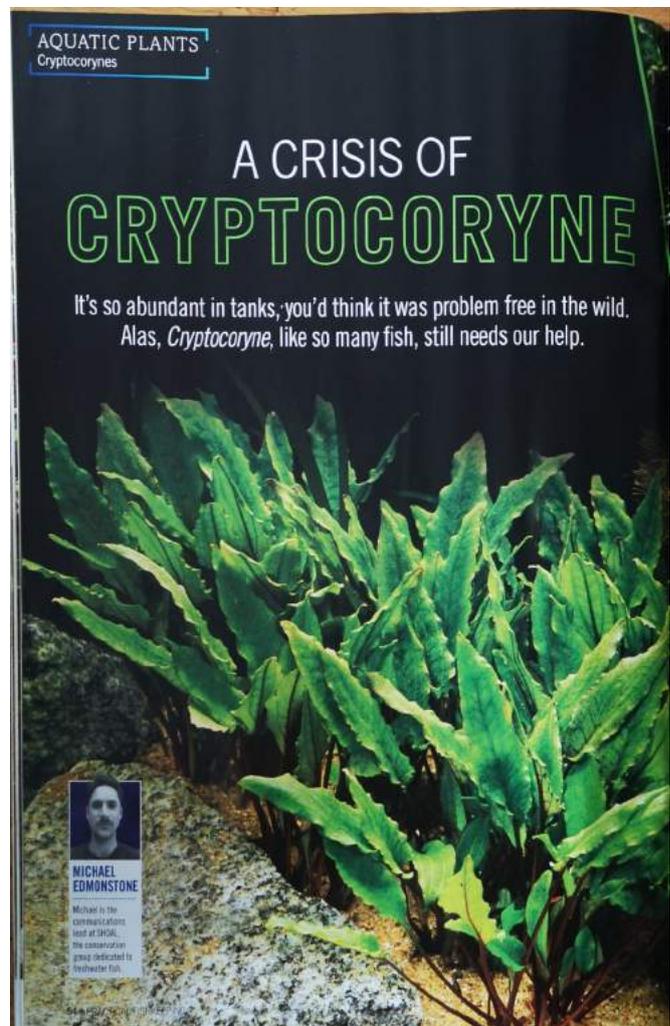
We have secured powerful coverage in the most popular magazines for the aquarium hobby in both the UK and the USA.

Amazonas in the USA published a piece about the Forgotten Fishes report, and Practical Fishkeeping (PFK) in the UK has published two articles written by Michael Edmondstone: one about the Forgotten Fishes report, and one about conservation of cryptocoryne species. PFK have subsequently published articles online and in print that reference conservation – and Shoal – with no input from us. It is exciting to see that the conservation conversation has been gathering pace in these publications.

Mike Baltzer was also interviewed for an article that featured in fly fishing magazine The Wading List, which you can read here:

thewadinglist.com/interview-shoal-freshwater-fish-overlooked-and-underfunded/

Each of these examples of earned media will help us reach new audiences and engage ever more people in the pressing issues of freshwater conservation.



SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE TRAFFIC GROWTH

Our social media platforms have seen consistent community growth since the start of the year.

Twitter has grown from 1,185 followers to 2,178 (as of 14th September 2021), representing nearly 100% growth in eight months.

Facebook and LinkedIn have both grown by more than 100% in the same time.

The website has also seen traffic growth of more than 100% throughout the same period, for both the numbers of users and the new users. This doesn't take into account large spikes in traffic, which coincide with the launch of the Search for the Lost Fishes and the Lost Fishes Art Challenge. These spikes have seen 600% growth in website traffic compared with the start of the year.

The steady social media and website traffic growth prove we are engaging a growing audience, and communicating the messages about freshwater conservation ever further.

NEWSLETTER



© Jeremy Shelton

The Stream: June 2021

Hello from all at Shoal 🐟

The biggest news of the past quarter is the launch of our flagship campaign Search for the Lost Fishes. With help from our partners Re:wild and the IUCN-SSC Freshwater Fish Specialist Group, we've chosen our Top 10 Most Wanted species and have started fundraising to work with partner teams in the field to try and rediscover these bizarre and remarkable species 🔍

We rolled out our quarterly newsletter in March, with the second edition in June. This has been a good opportunity to keep our subscribers updated both with Shoal's work, and broader news from the world of freshwater conservation. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many subscribers writing to us to say it is excellent to read a regular newsletter that curates interesting updates.

The third edition will be released at the end of September.

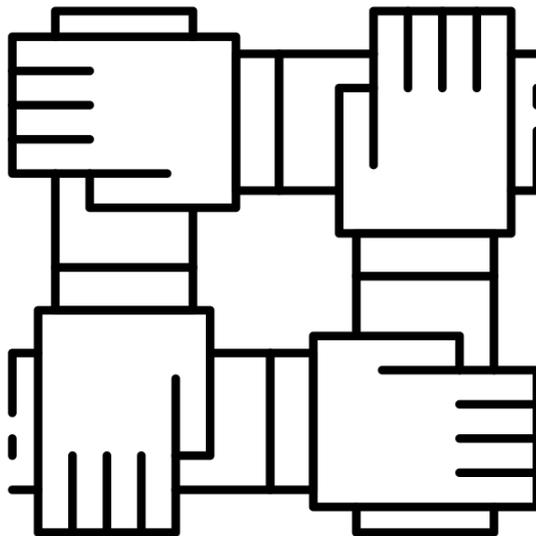
Sign up here: shoalconservation.org/newsletter-sign-up/

PARTNERSHIPS

Working with the IUCN Freshwater Fish Specialist Group (FFSG), Shoal was primarily established to support action directed by the FFSG, and for this reason we have weekly contact with both the leaders and increasingly members of the group throughout the world. We take this opportunity to congratulate Brian Zimmerman and Kathy Hughes as the newly elected co-chairs of the group. Dr Harmony Patricio, Shoal Conservation Programme Manager, continues to support the FFSG directly as part of her full-time role with Shoal and Re:wild.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Shoal has focused much of its work on developing new partnerships with key organisations in strategic locations to expand the action for freshwater species. Each new partner will be approved through a thorough due diligence process in line with the processes of our hosts, Synchronicity Earth and Re:wild.



The Shoal team is working on the development of new partnerships with four strategic partners in Mexico, Tanzania, India, Indonesia, Madagascar and Vietnam. These are all expected to be completed in the next nine months.

LOOKING AHEAD

Three conservation actions in the next six months

SEARCH FOR THE FAT CATFISH

In November we will be launching an expedition to search for the fat catfish of Colombia – the first expedition of the Search for the Lost Fishes campaign.

Our in field partners – Carlos do Nascimento (Colombian-Venezuelan ichthyologist and curator of the freshwater fish collection at the Alexander von Humbolt institute), Iván Mojica of the National University of Colombia, media experts Ictiología y Cultura, and Lina Valencia from Re:wild – will collaborate to take eDNA samples of Lake Tota, where the fat catfish was last spotted in the 1950s.

We hope that these samples will shed some light on where the fat catfish may be hiding, ready for the team to try catch some in a future expedition.

We will provide photo and video updates of the expedition every step of the way. Stay up to date at: shoalconservation.org/news/



Left: Lake Tota
© Dr Ian Harrison

VIETNAM

COVID-19 restrictions allowing, the expedition (funded by Fishmongers Company) to Nui Chua National Park, Phuoc Binh National Park and Nui Ong Nature Reserve in southern Vietnam will go ahead. This will be the first ever fish surveys in these three very unique habitats. The results of the survey will help to fill a large hole in the story of fish taxonomy and biogeography in Vietnam. Further work includes surveys in central Vietnam for the Annamite Barb *Hypsibarbus annamensis* as part of the Lost Fishes campaign and ASAP listed fishes in Vietnam.

MALAYSIA

Shoal is helping to fundraise and catalyse further survey work and conservation action for peat swamp fishes in Johor, Perak, Pahang and Selangor states primarily with GEC and with Dr Amir Ahmad of the Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. Funding is also being sought to undertake vital and urgent conservation work for two endemic Critically Endangered Clarias fishes in Tioman and Redang islands.



Waterfall in Tioman Island, Malaysia
Photo courtesy of Ammar Al Hasan, via Flickr.



Parosphromenus in Malaysian peat swamp © Wentian Shi



Parosphromenus in Malaysian peat swamp © Wentian Shi



A peat swamp in Malaysia © Parosphromenus Project