

# Worldwide appeal finds last remaining Madagascan fish

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Credit: ZSL

Aquarists at ZSL London Zoo are celebrating the phenomenal success of a worldwide appeal to find a female mate for a critically-endangered fish species – after a small population was found in remote Madagascar.

The Mangarahara cichlid (*Ptychochromis insolitus*) was believed to be lost in the wild due to intense deforestation and river diversions created for rice farming and agriculture drying up its native habitat of the Mangarahara River in Madagascar, and two of the last known individuals – both male - were residing in ZSL London Zoo's Aquarium.

After launching a desperate appeal in May 2013, hundreds of private aquarium owners, fish collectors, and scientists got in touch with the Zoo's Aquarium Curator, Brian Zimmerman, to offer up advice, support and suggestions.

One of those to respond to the appeal was a farm and business owner in Madagascar, who recognised the fish as one he'd seen in a secluded north-Madagascan town.

An exploratory expedition was arranged with vital support from HM Ambassador in the British Embassy of Madagascar, so that, along with aquarists from Toronto Zoo in Canada, Brian Zimmerman and Kienan Parbles from ZSL London Zoo could head off to Madagascar to search for the Mangarahara cichlid.

After days of searching empty streams, and rapidly losing hope of finding the cichlid, the team visited a tiny village built on the edge of a now-disconnected tributary from the Mangarahara River.



Female Mangarahara cichlid

With help from local villagers, areas of water were cordoned off using nets to mark the search areas. Initially finding only other native species, the team were ecstatic when they finally found the first one of the last remaining Mangarahara cichlids in existence.

Brian Zimmerman said: "We are simply thrilled that we found the Mangarahara cichlid surviving in Madagascar.

"We weren't holding out much hope of finding any fish in the wild, as so much of the Mangarahara River now resembles the desert because of deforestation and intensive agricultural use.

"These cichlids have shown remarkable survival skills, and managed to find one of the very last remaining water sources to live in, but their numbers are tiny and the non-flowing water is not an ideal habitat for them. We're now doing all we can to protect these remaining [fish](#)."

As part of ZSL London Zoo's Fish Net conservation project, which focuses on protecting freshwater species, Brian and the team moved 18 of the Mangarahara cichlids to a private aquaculture facility in Madagascar, where they will receive specialist care while conservation plans are made to bring the species back from the brink of extinction.

Provided by Zoological Society of London

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