

Turkey hails discovery of endangered leopard barbel fish

January 18 2024



The leopard barbel fish was last seen in the wild more than a decade ago.

Turkey on Thursday hailed the unexpected sighting of the leopard barbel fish—listed as one of the most endangered in the world—in the Tigris

River.

Environmentalists say the spotted carp-like fish was last seen in the wild more than a decade ago and was feared to have become extinct.

Turkey's Agriculture Minister Ibrahim Yumakli called the leopard barbel "one of the 10 most sought-after fish in the world".

The discovery "is good news for the protection and development of our country's biodiversity," he said in a social media statement.

The fish was discovered by a team that included scientists from Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan University and members of the Re:wild and SHOAL conservationist programs.

"There is nothing quite like the feeling of finding that a species that has been pushed to the brink of extinction is still hanging on, despite the odds," Recep Tayyip Erdogan University associate professor Cuneyt Kaya said.

The fish was once abundant in the rivers of eastern Turkey and parts of Syria and neighboring Iran and Iraq.

Environmentalists say the fish suffered from pollution and dams set up along the Tigris and Euphrates River system to support local agriculture.

The Swiss-based International Union for Conservation of Nature last month reported that 25 percent of the world's freshwater fish species were at risk of extinction.

"Freshwater ecosystems play a tremendous role in maintaining the overall health of our planet," Re:wild and SHOAL freshwater fish conservation program manager Harmony Patricio said.

"We hope the rediscovery of the leopard barbel will serve as an inspiring catalyst for future freshwater biodiversity conservation efforts in this region."

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Citation: Turkey hails discovery of endangered leopard barbel fish (2024, January 18) retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2024-01-turkey-hails-discovery-endangered-leopard.html>

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