

IUCN declares extinction of the Chinese paddlefish, with dam-building likely to be a major factor

By Xiaoai

Abstract:

According to the IUCN Sturgeon Specialist Group (SSG) new assessment published on July 21, 2022, 100 percent of the world's 26 remaining sturgeon species are now at risk of extinction, up from 85 percent in 2009, and the IUCN officially declared the extinction of the Chinese paddlefish, *Psephurus gladius*. In September 2021, a report co-published by United Nations agencies noted that while overfishing and pollution had contributed to the acceleration of extinction, the construction of multiple dams in the Yangtze River, the Chinese paddlefish's natural habitat, may have resulted in its distinction. Dam construction has affected all sturgeon species that migrate to their breeding grounds, and warming rivers due to climate change have further disrupted sturgeon reproduction.

Key words:

Chinese paddlefish, species extinction, IUCN, Hydropower station construction, biodiversity

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The screenshot shows the IUCN Red List entry for *Psephurus gladius*. At the top, there is a search bar with the species name and navigation links for 'Advanced', 'About', 'Assessment process', and 'Res'. Below the search bar, there are links for 'Back to search results' and 'Jump to Chinese Paddlefish: In detail'. The main title is 'Chinese Paddlefish' in large black font, followed by the scientific name '*Psephurus gladius*'. Under the 'ABSTRACT' section, it states: 'Chinese Paddlefish *Psephurus gladius* has most recently been assessed for *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* in 2019. *Psephurus gladius* is listed as Extinct.' Below this, there is a section for 'THE RED LIST ASSESSMENT' with a citation: 'Qiwei, W. 2022. *Psephurus gladius*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2022: e.T18428A146104283. Accessed on 2...'. At the bottom, there is a horizontal bar showing the IUCN Red List categories: NOT EVALUATED (NE), DATA DEFICIENT (DD), LEAST CONCERN (LC), NEAR THREATENED (NT), VULNERABLE (VU), ENDANGERED (EN), CRITICALLY ENDANGERED (CR), and EXTINCT IN THE WILD (EW). The 'EXTINCT' category (EX) is highlighted with a large black circle and the text 'EXTINCT EX'. To the right of the bar is the IUCN logo and the Chinese text '中国绿发会'.

Source: IUCN Red List



The paddlefish once had a range that is now extinct

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Event Chinese Paddlefish Extinction



While overfishing and pollution played an accelerating role, much of its demise can be attributed to the multiple dam constructions in the Chinese Paddlefish's natural habitat: the Yangtze River. The 'last nail in the coffin' was the construction of the Gezhouba Dam in 1981, which effectively cut the Chinese Paddlefish off from its only spawning ground, which was further upstream. While wild caught freshwater fish provides food security and livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people across the world, the Chinese Paddlefish no longer can. In fact, the Chinese Paddlefish is not alone: 30 species of freshwater fish disappeared in 2020, and another 76 have been classified as 'critically endangered, possibly extinct'. Aside from the loss of unique biodiversity, freshwater fish extraction has other long term impacts. While freshwater makes up only 1 per cent of Earth's area, 57 per cent of known fish species can be found there, and they are an important source of nutrition and income for communities around the world. At least 43 per cent of the wild freshwater fish harvest comes from 50 low-income, food-deficient countries, where access to other forms of quality food is limited. Freshwater fish also play an important role in the food chain as they are eaten by larger animals. (for example: bears).

Dams are not the only reason why these fish go extinct, but they play an important role. Around the world, more than 40,000 large dams have been built since the 1960s, and 3,700 further dam projects are pending. Many of these

projects are planned in areas that are considered biodiversity hotspots, including the Amazon, Congo and Mekong rivers. It is estimated that these dams will alter 92 per cent of the river volume worldwide, which means they have an impact on almost all global habitats of freshwater fish.



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