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## Species of the Day: Mekong Giant Catfish

The **Mekong Giant Catfish**, *Pangasianodon gigas*, is classified as 'Critically Endangered' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™. It is the world's largest freshwater fish and is found only in the parts of the Mekong River basin that run through Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and possibly Burma and China.

The Mekong Giant Catfish has been subject to overfishing for many years. As a result of damming and clearance of the flooded forest near the Tonle Sap Lake, its habitat has been severely disrupted affecting its migration, spawning, eating and breeding habits.

Legislation restricting the hunting of Mekong Giant Catfish exists but is rarely enforced. Artificially spawned individuals have been released into the River Mekong since 1985, and captive breeding (reliant on wild-caught brood stock) has been taking place since 2001. The potentially highly significant impact of dams needs urgent assessment, as recent studies suggest that all large migratory catfish will be eliminated from the river system if two or more mainstream dams are constructed without effective adaptation measures.



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