

‘Endangered fish regularly exported’

Neha Madaan | TNN

Pune: As many as 1.5 million freshwater fish of India belonging to 30 threatened species were exported from the country between 2005 and 2012. Of these, three endangered and vulnerable species, two of which are found in the Western Ghats, formed a significant portion of the exports, a recent research by the city-based Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) and several research institutes across the world has revealed.

The study also said that nine of the 20 threatened species exported during the period show a perpetual decline in their populations and despite such threats, India has no law that protects freshwater fish per se.

The study found that a major chunk of the trade involves the red lined torpedo barbs (RLTBs), a species complex of colourful cyprinids. The species' haphazard collection during the last 20 years has led to a decline in its population, resulting in its inclusion in the 'endangered' listing in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Neelesh Dahanukar of IISER said, "More than three lakh RLTBs were exported from India between 2005 and 2012 to seven countries. We think the original number of the fish picked up would have been more than this to make up for the high mortality rate in this species after harvest."

Courtesy: Rajeev Raghavan



According to the study, threatened and conservation concern endemic freshwater fish species exported during April 2012 include Striped Loach, Longfin Barb, Banded Chromide, Cardamom Garra, Yellow Catfish, Glimmer Barb, Red Tailed Barb, Kalkkari Catfish, Hatchet Fish, Spike Tail Paradise Fish, Golden Mahseer, Redlined Torpedo Barb, Denisonii Barb and New Malabar Loach of Western Ghats

The research was recently published in the international journal 'Biological Conservation' and also involved institutes such as the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (UK), Institute of Aquaculture (Czech Republic), New England Aquarium (USA) and Roger Williams University (USA), among others.

Dahanukar added that a majority of the wild-caught aquarium fish from India

come from biodiversity hotspots such as the Western Ghats and eastern Himalayas. "Of more than 100 species in trade from the Western Ghats, around 12 are regularly exported. In addition, we found that between 2005 and 2012, the main markets for RLTBs were Singapore (48.63%), Hong Kong (30.52%) and Malaysia (18.4%). A small number was exported to UK, Japan and Germany," he said.

Researchers also found that between 2005 and 2012 more than 89,000 RLTBs were collected and exported during the breeding season that extends from October to March. This made for 11-44% of the annual exports.

Dahanukar said the trade of threatened species through aquarium pet markets is a current or potential threat to 22 endemic freshwater fish of the country, of which 12 are already threatened. "Species that are threatened yet regularly exported from the country have a restricted occupancy. For example, the zebra loach occupies segmented locations in a limited area of occupancy and had over 3,80,000 of its fish exported during the seven-year period," he said.

Novel species, which are of conservation concern, are also being exported. These include, 'Gonoproktopterus thomasi', a critically endangered species that has a restricted distribution, and endangered species 'Glyptothorax housei', that comes from a single location in the Western Ghats.