



## AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE TO THE COMMON FISHES OF KARNATAKA

The following is a simple identification guide to the common species of fish that you are likely to encounter while angling in state waters. It is important to accurately document every catch and hence we urge you to spend some time on familiarising yourself with these species. The practice of reporting catches encourages transfer of information and serves as an ongoing census. The coloured boxes to the left indicate whether a species is native (blue), translocated/introduced (grey) or exotic (yellow). The coloured boxes to the right indicate our recommendation for release (dark green), recommended release (light green) or recommended removal (pink).

The IUCN status is depicted in the bar below the image. More information can be accessed on the IUCN website (<https://www.iucnredlist.org/>) or on the Fishbase website ([www.fishbase.in](http://www.fishbase.in)) by entering the Italicized scientific names provided. If you are looking for area specific information or are unable to access information on the internet, you may write to [friendsofwasi@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwasi@gmail.com).



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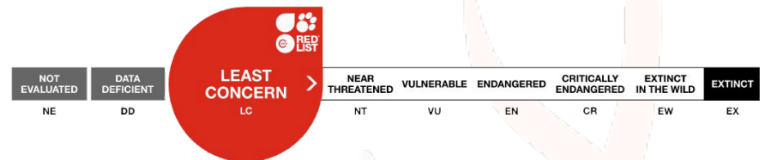
### SWAMP BARB (*SYSTEMUS SUBNASUTUS*)

A small carp with moderately prominent scales. Colours can vary from silvery to olive-silver. The head is small with a small slightly ventral mouth position. They are often misidentified as Carnatic carp. The structure of the dorsal spine can be used to distinguish the two. While the swamp barb has a short and stocky dorsal spine, the Carnatic carp has a long and sturdy spine. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)



Native

Release



### COMMON CARP (*CYPRINUS CARPIO*)

This is an invasive species introduced through aquaculture. They have a distinct light yellow coloured mouth that is a dead giveaway to this species. From above, they can be identified easily in have dull yellow to brown fins. Scales are large and prominent. They have a stocky tail with a shallow fork. They can be distinguished from most carps in having an extended dorsal fin that trails off and ends beyond the anal fin base. The other fish with this feature is the Catla, but in the case of the Catla, the dorsal fin ends before the anal fin base. (Photo source: Fishbase)



Exotic

Recommended removal





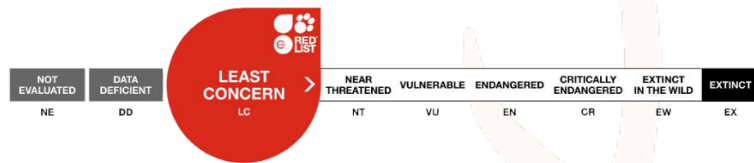
### KANTAKA BARB (*OSTEOCHILUS BREVIDORSALIS*)

A small carp with moderately small scales. Colours can vary from silvery to olive-silver. The prominent lateral stripe is a characteristic feature. The head is small with a large eye. They are often misidentified as juvenile Carnatic carp and swamp barbs. While the swamp barb has a short and stocky dorsal spine, the Carnatic carp and the Kantaka barb have a long and sturdy spine. The size of the scales can be used to tell the difference between the later two species. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)



Native

Release



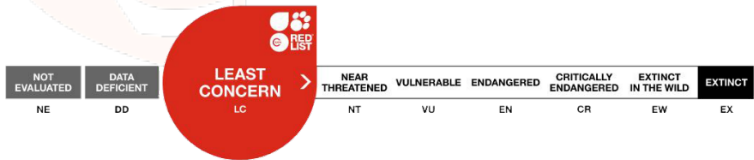
### KALABANS (*LABEO CALBASU*)

The fish is dorsally dark brown-black and ventrally lighter in colour. The head is small and eyes located above the corner of the mouth. They have a typical carplike shape but are distinguishable from other carps in the shape of the dorsal fin. The dorsal spine is long and extends beyond the fleshy membranes of the fin. The posterior most fin ray is long (not visible in this picture), so when the dorsal fin is extended, it has a sail like appearance. Scales are small compared to other carps. (Photo source: Sheik Imran)

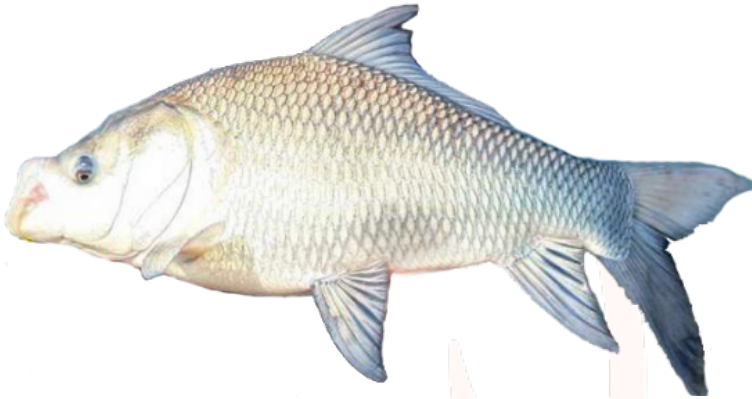




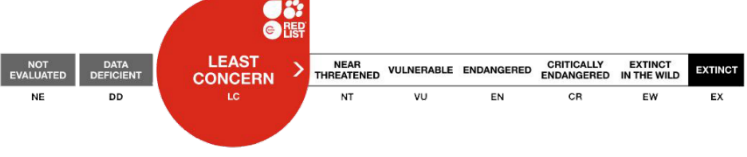
Native

Release









CATLA ( <i>CATLA CATLA</i> )	
<p>The first impression is of a deep bodied carp, longitudinally restricted with solid and rounded head profile. The mouth is large and slightly terminally positioned. Scales are prominent like in most carps but are smaller compared to Carnatic carp and mahseer. The most prominent feature is the shape of the head, with a heady rounded profile, the face is unique and appears 'pug-like'. The gill plate is large occupying 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the head. The dorsal fin is different from other carps as it trails off, ending just before the anal fin base. They are often mistaken for the common carp but are different in having smaller scales and having a silvery blue colour opposed to a darker yellow brown in the later. The Dorsal fin on the common carp also trails off but ends posterior to the anal fin base. (Photo source: Sheik Imran)</p>	
Translocated	Recommended release
	

ROHU ( <i>LABEO ROHITA</i> )	
<p>At a first glance rohu are identified by the pink to bright orange fins. These fish are commonly misidentified as grass carp and mrigal. Rohu have a straight forehead profile and a small mouth that can be used to identify it. Care should be taken not to mistake rohu for mrigal. (Photo source: Sheik Imran)</p>	
Translocated	Recommended release
	



MRIGAL ( <i>CIRRHINUS MRIGALA</i> )	
<p>Elongated carplike with a lustrous silver colour. Scales are moderately large. The head is triangular in profile. They are often mistaken for grass carp and rohu. The lack of redish tinge and the triangular head profile can be used to distinguish the mrigal from the two species. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)</p>	
<b>Translocated</b>	<b>Recommended release</b>
	

CAUVERY MRIGAL ( <i>CIRRHINUS CIRRHOSUS</i> )	
<p>Virtually indistinguishable from <i>C. mrigala</i> which is the aquaculture version of Gangetic origin.(Photo source: Fishbase)</p>	
<b>Native endemic</b>	<b>Release</b>
	



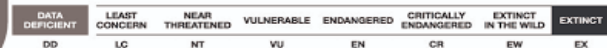
### GRASS CARP (*CTENOPHARYNGODON IDELLA*)

The grass carp has an elongated appearance. They are generally olive green in colour with a torpedo like head profile. They have moderately large scales. They are easily confused with rohu and mrigal carps. They differ from rohu in having a greenish colour as compared to a pink-red colour in Rohu. The head of the grass carp is relatively larger and more robust to the mrigal and rohu. Rohu have a more terminally oriented mouth while the head profile of mrigal is more triangular compared to the grass carp. (Photo source: Fishbase)



Exotic

Recommended removal



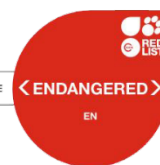
### BLUE FIN MAHSEER (*TOR 'BLUE FIN'*)

Mahseer have the largest scales among the carps, they can be easily distinguished from other carps in having a large head and mouth. The blue fin mahseer are the most commonly found type and the most varied in appearance. They can be identified among other mahseer by having a silver blue body colour, a smaller head, fins coloured either dark blue or light electric-blue. Note: juvenile blue fin mahseer look very different from the adults, they may have orange fins. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)



Translocated

Release





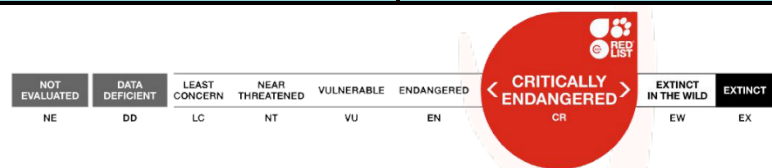
### HUMPBACK MAHSEER (*TOR REMADEVII*)

The humpback mahseer is the largest mahseer in the world. They have large scales and a large head. While they have a typical carplike appearance, they can be distinguished from other large carps and mahseers in having orange fins and a prominent humped profile and a discontinuous line (kink) in the gill plate. The gill plate kink, orange fins, fleshy lips, terminally positioned eyes and terminally positioned mouth are sure identification characters of this species. (Photo Source: *unknown*, from Kodagu district)



Native endemic

Release



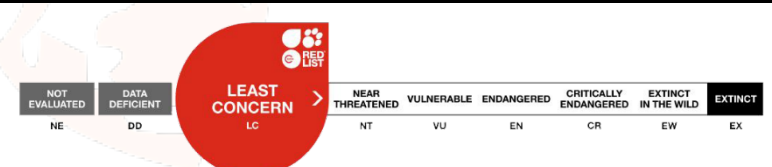
### OLIVE BARB (*PUNTIUS SARANA*)

The olive barb is a small fish, carplike, tinged with a drag green to dark blue. Scales are moderately large. The fish is easily confused with the Carnatic carp. Differing in the profile of the head. Olive barb has lighter coloured fins as compared to Carnatic carp and they do not show the lateral strip as is visible in the larger Carnatic carp. (Photo source: Fishbase)



Native

Release







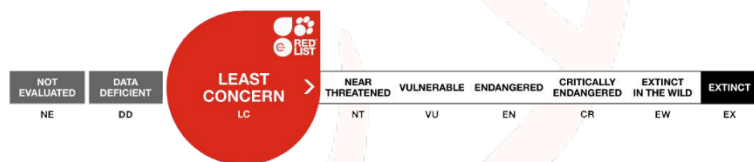
### CARNATIC CARP (*HYPSELOBARBUS CARNATICUS*)

The Carnatic carp have moderately large scales. Colours vary from golden brown to purple-brown. They have a strong dorsal fin a 'V' shape forked tail. The anal fin is prominent and sturdy. They are often mistaken for other carps, especially when young. They are different from mahseer in having a small head compared to the body and smaller scales, adults will generally have a band along the lateral line which separates a darker colour dorsally to a lighter colour ventrally. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)



Native

Recommended release



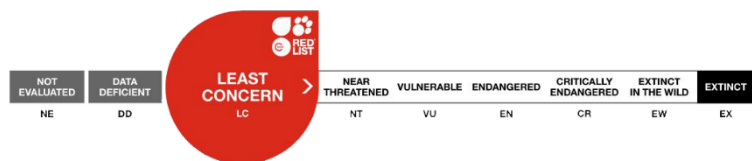
### ROSY BARB (*PETHIA CONCHONIUS*)

Rosy barb are small fish rarely growing larger than 5cm in length. They are generally silvery in colour but sometimes take on a pinkish flush. The prominent feature is a black spot on the anterior section of the tail. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)


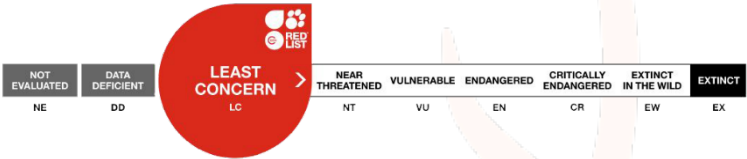



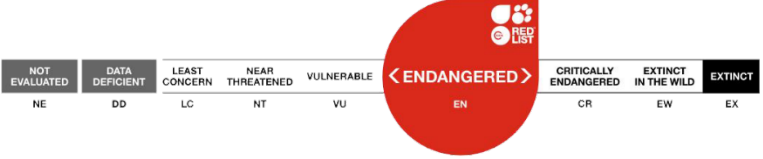
Native

Release





BARIL ( <i>BARILIUS GATENSIS</i> )	
<p>Often with a bluish pink tinge. Baril are commonly found in flowing streams. They have prominent vertical banding all along the body. The anal fin is elongated and at 45 degrees to the lateral line. They are often confused for the greater danio but are different in having vertical banding as opposed to horizontal banding. (Photo source: seriouslyfish.com)</p>	
Native	Release
	

PINK CARP ( <i>HYPSELOBARBUS MICROPOGON</i> )	
<p>Adult Pink carp have a distinctively elongated snout with a prominent ventrally oriented mouth. The body has a pinkish colouration on the ventral half. The dorsal half of the body is a deep blue-grey. Well-developed tubercles are a common feature on the snout, this can be used as a distinguishing character. Adults are quite distinct but juveniles can be mistaken for juvenile Carnatic carp and juvenile mahseer. The pronounced tubercles and relatively smaller scales will differentiate the pink carp from the two species mentioned above. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)</p>	
Native endemic	Release
	



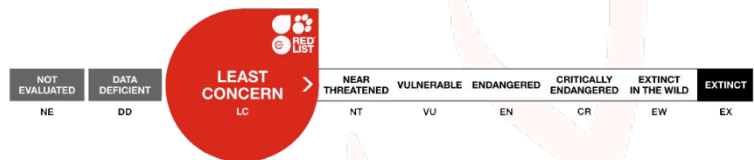
### GIANT DANIO (*DEVARIO AEQUIPINNATUS*)

The danio are small fish with a blueish body colour. They generally have horizontal yellow bands. They are often mistaken for the Baril which have vertical bands instead of horizontal bands. (Photo source: Fishbase)



Native

Release



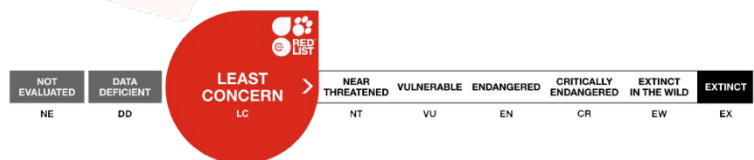
### AFRICAN CATFISH (*CLARIAS GARIEPINUS*)

African catfish are a notorious invasive species that grow to large sizes and have a dark green to black body colour, sometimes with light green mottling. The belly of the fish is generally white in colour. Their anal fin extends from behind the pelvic fin up to the base of the tail fin. They have a spherical tail fin, unforked. They can be easily mistaken for Snakeheads, Mystus catfish, spotted catfish and butter catfish. A dead giveaway is the dark colour with four pairs of whiskers. They can be distinguished from similar species in having a prominent pelvic fin and a long dorsal fin (longer than anal fin). (Photo source: F. Turan)



Exotic

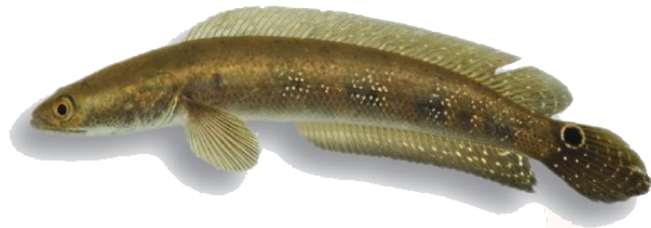
Recommended removal





### GREAT SNAKEHEAD (*CHANNA MARULIUS*)

Snakeheads comprise a complex group of species and can be identified in having an elongated body, dorsal and ventral fin and no prominent whiskers. The eyes are large, often coloured and placed anteriorly. They are often confused for the African catfish and tank goby. The African catfish have prominent whiskers which snakeheads lack. In the African catfish, the anterior origin of the dorsal fin lies in between the pectoral and pelvic fin whereas in snakeheads, the dorsal fin originates more anteriorly above the pectoral fins. They can be distinguished from tank gobies in having a longer ventral fin. The great snakehead (in picture), specifically can be distinguished from other snakeheads in having a prominent spot on the rounded caudal fin. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)



Native

Recommended release

NOT EVALUATED NE	DATA DEFICIENT DD	<b>LEAST CONCERN</b> LC	NEAR THREATENED NT	VULNERABLE VU	ENDANGERED EN	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED CR	EXTINCT IN THE WILD EW	EXTINCT EX
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### STRIPED SNAKEHEAD (*CHANNA STRIATA*)

The striped snakehead is a large snakehead with a dark body colouration. Ventrally, the body is lighter coloured with yellow or white. The stand out feature from other snakeheads is in having prominent striations as seen in the lower half of the body. The striations can sometimes extend into the dorsal half of the body forming light bands. (Photo source: Fishbase)


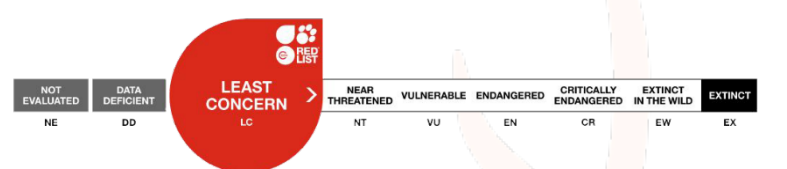




Native

Recommended release

NOT EVALUATED NE	DATA DEFICIENT DD	<b>LEAST CONCERN</b> LC	NEAR THREATENED NT	VULNERABLE VU	ENDANGERED EN	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED CR	EXTINCT IN THE WILD EW	EXTINCT EX
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DWARF SNAKEHEAD ( <i>CHANNA GACHUA</i> )	
<p>This dwarf snakehead shares all the typical features of the snakehead group. However, they do not grow as large as the other snakeheads. The dwarf snakehead can be distinguished from other snakeheads in having a more rounded head profile while the others have horizontally flattened head profiles. (Photo source: Siddharth rao)</p>	
Native	Release
	

FALSE MURREL ( <i>CHANA PSEUDOMARULIUS</i> )	
<p>The false murrel is remarkably similar to the great snakehead. It differs in having a longer head, lighter colouration and in missing the spot on the tail that characterises the great snakehead. (Photo source: Derek Dsouza)</p>	
Native	Release
	



**SUCKERMOUTH CATFISH (*PTERYGOPLICHTHYS SP.*)**

The South American suckermouth catfish is a relatively new introduction into south Indian rivers. They have a dark mottled appearance. They can be easily identified by four longitudinal scutes (ridges) running along the length of the body. The dorsal fin is large and sail like. The Caudal fins are bilobed terminating sharply. They are bottom feeders with a ventrally located mouth with suckermouth parts.



Exotic

Recommended removal



DATA DEFICIENT (DD)    LEAST CONCERN (LC)    NEAR THREATENED (NT)    VULNERABLE (VU)    ENDANGERED (EN)    CRITICALLY ENDANGERED (CR)    EXTINCT IN THE WILD (EW)    EXTINCT (EX)

**NILGIRI MYSTUS (*HEMIBAGRUS PUNCTATUS*)**

The Cauvery spotted catfish has a smooth skin with a characteristic maroon to brown tinge. They have a characteristic row of black dots along the lateral line that can be used definitely to distinguish this species from other closely related species. They are often confused with the mystus catfishes but can be told apart easily from the nature of the bifurcated dorsal fin. In the Cauvery spotted catfish, the posterior dorsal fin is reduced compared to the elongated ones present on the mystus species. (Photo source: Simon J Dunbar)




Native endemic


Release

NOT EVALUATED (NE)    DATA DEFICIENT (DD)    LEAST CONCERN (LC)    NEAR THREATENED (NT)    VULNERABLE (VU)    ENDANGERED (EN)    **CRITICALLY ENDANGERED (CR)**    EXTINCT IN THE WILD (EW)    EXTINCT (EX)









MULLEY ( <i>WALLAGO ATTU</i> )																			
<p>The mulley is a large catfish, they are silvery grey in colour and have a smooth skin. They have two prominent whiskers and multiple rows of sharp teeth. The head is solid and flattened horizontally. The ventral fin is elongated extending from behind the pelvic fin up to the base of the tail fin, this feature sets them apart from the spotted catfish and mystus species which have a bifurcated ventral fin. The dorsal fin is small and is present above and anterior to the pelvic fins. They are easily confused for the butter catfish but can be differentiated on having a solid and prominent gill plate. The butter catfish has a faint dark patch on the dorsal half of the body, posterior to the gill plate. They mulley does not have this even when young. (Photo source: Sheik Imran)</p>																			
Native	Release																		
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NE	DD	LC	NT	VU	EN	CR	EW	EX											

SHEENGTEE ( <i>MYSTUS SEENGTEE</i> )																			
<p>The Shingtee can be distinguished from the rest of the catfish in having a bifurcated dorsal fin. The anterior fin is sturdy with the first ray forming a spine while the posterior dorsal fin is elongated. They have very long whiskers. The tail fin is deeply forked, forming two separate fins, The dorsal lobe being longer than the ventral lobe. The Shingtee is often confused for the Nilgiri mystus but the structure of the tail fin lobes and a black spot at the base of the dorsal spine is a characteristic to the Shingtee. (Photo source: Sheik Imran).</p>																			
Native	Release																		
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NOT EVALUATED	DATA DEFICIENT	LEAST CONCERN	NEAR THREATENED	VULNERABLE	ENDANGERED	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	EXTINCT IN THE WILD	EXTINCT											
NE	DD	LC	NT	VU	EN	CR	EW	EX											



KNIFE FISH ( <i>NOTOPTERUS NOTOPTERUS</i> )	
<p>The fish has a distinct body form characterised by a tear drop shape. The ventral and tail fins are fused. The dorsal fin is weak and placed mid-body, along the horizontal axis. The eye is large and prominent. They maybe confused with the young mulley or butter catfish, but after consideration fused ventral and tail fins, they can be distinguished from the two. (Photo source: Fishbase)</p>	
<b>Native</b>	<b>Release</b>
	

TANK GOBY ( <i>GLOSSOGOBIUS GIURIS</i> )	
<p>They are elongated fish, with a blotchy colouration, often with speckles or banding on the tail fin. They are most often mistaken with snakeheads. While their appearance is almost the same, they can be distinguished from snakeheads in having a bifurcated dorsal fin. Snakeheads have a single long dorsal fin. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)</p>	
<b>Native</b>	<b>Release</b>
	





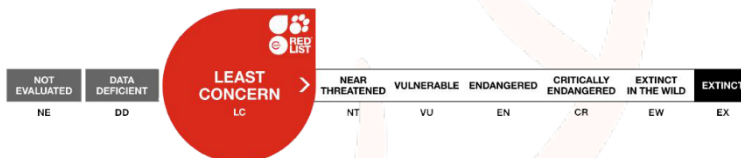
**STRIPED STONE SUCKER (*GARRA MULLYA*)**

The striped stone sucker is unique in appearance, they have a strong band running across the body that is characteristic of the striped stone sucker. They have a ventrally located mouth which is specialized for grazing algae on rocks. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)



Native

Recommended release



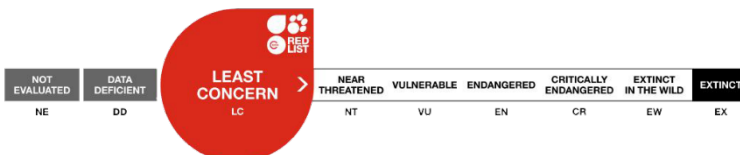
**PEARL SPOT (*ETROPLUS SURATENSIS*)**

The pearl spot have a unique body colouration with a black and green combination, they have prominent light-coloured spots and dark vertical banding. The body profile is more rounded than the African tilapias. The tail fin is not lobed. They have a distinctive spot at the pectoral fin after which they get their name. The ventral fin is elongated beginning below the pectoral fin whereas in the tilapias the ventral fin originates at the vent. (Photo source: Naren Sreenivasan)



Native

Release





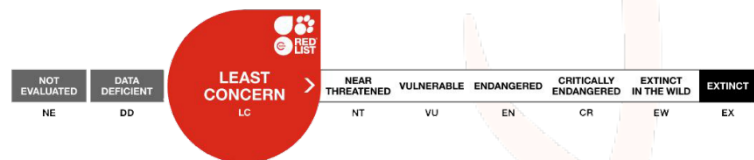
### SPINY EEL (*MASTACEMBELUS ARMATUS*)

The spiny eel is quite distinguishable from all the other fishes. Their slender, snake like body end posteriorly with a complete fin surrounding the profile. The head is small and pointed. (Photo credit: Naren Sreenivasan)



Native

Recommended release



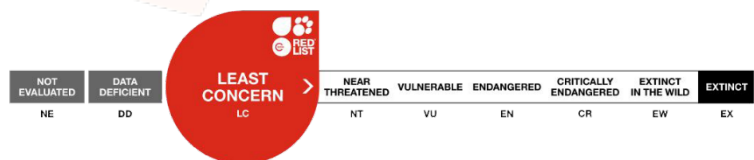
### NILE TILAPIA (*OREOCHROMIS NILOTICUS*)

Tilapia's belong to an easily identifiable group. They are characterised by a large elongated dorsal fin. The posterior spines of the dorsal fin are always longer than the anterior spines. The tail fin is not forked. There are two common varieties of tilapia in India. The Nile tilapia can be distinguished by the presence of strong vertical banding on the tail fin. It is also deeper bodied than the Mozambique tilapia and sometimes has vertical banding on the body. (USGS, science for a changing world)






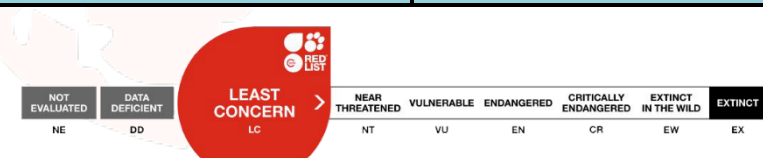
Exotic

Recommended removal





MOZAMBIQUE TILAPIA ( <i>OREOCHROMIS MOSSAMBICUS</i> )	
<p>Of the two tilapias, the Mozambique tilapia has the least body depth. The tail fin is generally free of vertical bars, this can be used to tell them apart from the Nile tilapia. The body is darker in colour and has a blotchy pattern. (Photo source: Fisbbase)</p>	
<b>Exotic</b>	<b>Recommended removal</b>
	

CORSULA ( <i>RHINOMUGIL CORSULA</i> )	
<p>These fish are often seen schooling on the water surface with their eyes exposed, often diving when disturbed. They are slender bodied with a slightly upturned head. The tail fin is large and un-forked. The body shape of these fish are quite unique, making it hard to misidentify them. (Photo source: Fishbase)</p>	
<b>Native</b>	<b>Release</b>
	

For more information, follow us on social media- Instagram (WASIINDIA), Facebook page (WASI – Wildlife Association of South India) or Twitter (WASIIND).

Don't forget to check out our field guide on **best practices for “catch and release” angling** on our website [www.wasiindia.com](http://www.wasiindia.com)