

# The Golden Mahseer

*Tor putitora*



Native to the  
Himalayas



CONSERVATION  
STATUS:

**ENDANGERED**

Their migration routes  
are strictly within  
freshwater habitats.



largest verified  
records

**150**  
centimetres



*T. putitora*

**32 kg**



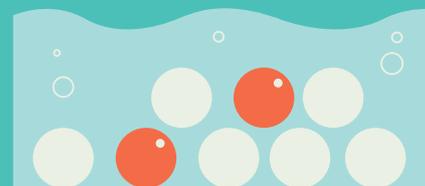
**48h**

**50km**

during their migration  
they can cover more than  
50 km in 48 hours against  
ferocious currents

they can live  
in temperatures  
ranging from

**5°C**  
to  
**25°C**



the fish dig **shallow nests** and deposit  
their eggs amongst stones and  
gravel in **well oxygenated shallow**  
**water**

# The Golden Mahseer

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## Range and habitat

*Tor putitora*, the golden mahseer, is a large growing migratory fish that lives in high energy river systems of the Himalayan region in Asia. They are a potamodromous species of fish, meaning their migration routes are strictly within freshwater habitats.

The first phase of their migration is when adults migrate upstream towards tributaries from the larger rivers. However, mature fish that are ready to spawn do not continue their journey to smaller streams until monsoon season (typically early summer); their spawning grounds are typically rain-fed streams and small streams that do not possess enough water or may even be completely dry until the monsoon.

Monsoonal flows cause the river to become turbid and warm, and this triggers the brooders (spawning fish) to migrate upstream to the spawning sites. During their journey, it is recorded that they can cover more than 50 km in less than 48 hours, against ferocious currents.

After reaching suitable breeding grounds, where the conditions are optimal for reproduction, the fish excavate shallow nests, much like salmon, and deposit their eggs amongst stones and gravel in well oxygenated shallow water. Once hatched, the larvae remain within the interstitial spaces between the gravel, where they absorb their yolk sacs before emerging and feeding for themselves. Spawning is followed by the last phase of migration when the adult fish descend downstream. This is followed by the downstream drift and dispersal of the juveniles which recruit to the lower reaches of rivers, where the habitat and food resources are suitable to grow to adulthood.

## Size

Adult golden mahseer have been historically reported to grow up to 275 cm, weighing in at a maximum of 54 kilos. However, such claims lack hard evidence, with the largest verified records more typically being in the region of 150 cm and 32 kg. Large head, large scales and a dark lateral stripe of pigmentation characteristic features of mahseer. Globally, the golden mahseer has iconic status due to its large size, attractive golden color, and sporting value.

## Feeding

Born in the upper streams of the rivers in the Himalayan region, the small fry forage on diatoms (microscopic plant-like organisms) while they seek shelter in the puddles out of the currents. As young fish, they mostly eat insects and plant material. As adults, they eat other fishes and plants. In the monsoon period, scientists observed that plants dominated their diet.

## Commercial role/current status

Since the golden mahseer is also known for its good taste, they are also heavily fished for consumption. Because of this, specimens over 30 centimeters and 5 kilos are becoming increasingly scarce. The golden mahseer is also one of the most prized sportfish of the Asian continent due to its appearance and fighting ability.

The IUCN red list classifies the golden mahseer as Endangered. They are endangered mostly due to the indiscriminate fishing of brooders and juveniles. Also, the effects of dams are devastating for populations. Because of its status, physical features, and ecology, it is crucial to promote the golden mahseer as a flagship and umbrella conservation species.

Unfortunately, despite its ecological and economic importance, specific conservation measures by way of protective legal provisions are lacking for golden mahseer in India. Also, hundreds of small and large dams envisaged on the Himalayan rivers will significantly compromise the habitats and sustainable population sizes of the fish.

Nowadays, not only have the population sizes significantly decreased, but also the average size of the fish has plummeted. This is due to a broad range of anthropogenic threats impacting on habitat and because the golden mahseer reaches a marketable size before being sexually mature.

## Bibliography

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