

1000 FISHES

CONSERVATION ACTION UPDATE

Critically Endangered Priority Fishes | 2026



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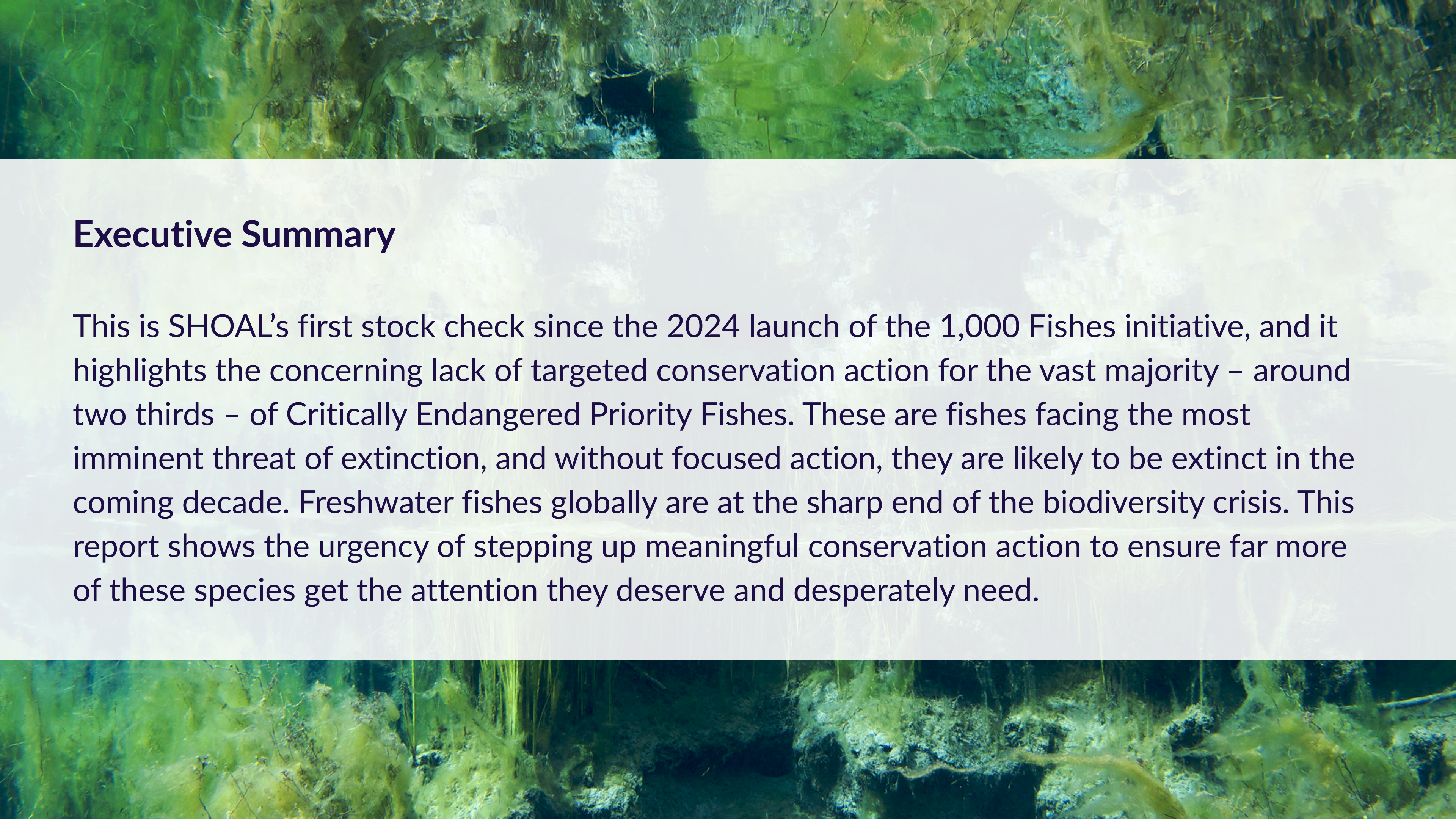
Contributor Thanks & Acknowledgements

This outreach effort was made possible by local and regional experts who took the time to submit data for these species. We are incredibly grateful for their time, attention, and thoroughness to share current conservation action data for Critically Endangered freshwater fishes. We would especially like to thank the IUCN SSC Freshwater Fish Specialist Group for their support and guidance with this effort.

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An underwater photograph showing a rocky seabed covered in green algae and seaweed. The water is slightly murky, and the lighting is natural, coming from above. The rocks are dark and jagged, providing a natural habitat for the marine life.

Executive Summary

This is SHOAL's first stock check since the 2024 launch of the 1,000 Fishes initiative, and it highlights the concerning lack of targeted conservation action for the vast majority – around two thirds – of Critically Endangered Priority Fishes. These are fishes facing the most imminent threat of extinction, and without focused action, they are likely to be extinct in the coming decade. Freshwater fishes globally are at the sharp end of the biodiversity crisis. This report shows the urgency of stepping up meaningful conservation action to ensure far more of these species get the attention they deserve and desperately need.



The aim of this data collection and analysis effort is to monitor progress towards SHOAL's goal of mobilising conservation action for 1,000 of the world's most threatened freshwater fish by 2035.

35%

of our Critically Endangered Priority Fishes are receiving targeted conservation action, That's 229 species.

108

countries were recorded with
conservation action data

76%

of CR species in a Priority Genera
have either active or passive
conservation action occurring

70+

experts contributed their time
and knowledge

46%

of CR fishes are receiving little
to no, or unknown levels of
conservation action

644

is how many CR species we
collected conservation
action data for

5

countries have no
recorded conservation
action data



878

conservation-action type
responses were recorded

41%

of CR fishes we recorded are
receiving active conservation
action, but it is not included in
their IUCN Red List assessment

BACKGROUND

In 2023, SHOAL launched our flagship 1000 Fishes initiative with the publication of [The 1,000 Fishes Blueprint](#), a document that sets out a plan to mobilise conservation action for 1,000 of the world's most threatened freshwater fishes by 2035. A cornerstone of this initiative is the creation and maintenance of the Priority Fishes database, which monitors threatened fishes, informed by the IUCN Red List. For a species to be considered a Priority Fish, they must be assessed on the Red List as Critically Endangered or Endangered. Species assessed as Vulnerable are also included, but only if they are highly restricted by area of occupancy or number of locations. When the report was published in 2023, there were 2,338 species that met this criteria. As of the July 2026 IUCN Red List update, there are now 2,596 species that meet the criteria and are classified as a SHOAL Priority Fish. The number of species that need conservation action is growing, and so must the effort to conserve them.

In order to understand where conservation action is occurring and where the gaps are largest, a priority for the 1000 Fishes initiative has been to monitor the status of conservation action for Priority Fishes. Formal species assessments are time-consuming undertakings, and while they often include information on conservation action, they may not reflect the most recent on-the-ground developments. This monitoring initiative began with the focus on Critically Endangered Priority Fishes, due to the severity of their conservation status. In the future, we intend to conduct this outreach and data collection for all Priority Fishes.

Our conservation action data was collected through surveying global freshwater fish experts. This effort was not aimed at assessing the efficacy of these actions, but rather to discern if they are taking place at all. By understanding who is working on our Priority Fish species, we can target gaps and support pre-existing efforts. For the purpose of this exercise, we defined conservation action as any in situ or ex situ work being done to recover a species. This includes: captive and ark-type breeding, legislative and habitat protections, habitat quality improvements, translocation, engineering modifications, community outreach and stewardship, as well as habitat sampling and eDNA collection.



© KENNETH CHIN GASTROMYZON LEPIDOGASTER

METHODS

The IUCN SSC Freshwater Fish Specialist Group Regional Chairs were our first point of contact. This group of global experts were invaluable for providing their own knowledge, as well as connecting us with other experts who could help fill data gaps in our collection efforts. In total, over 70 experts provided input on conservation action in their regions. SHOAL would like to thank the freshwater fish conservation community for their astonishing response to this data outreach effort.

We conducted multiple waves of outreach between January and April 2026, continually identifying gaps in order to target local and regional experts for specific countries and/or fishes. An open call was launched in March 2026 across our social channels to broaden the data collection effort.

In order to categorise the types of possible conservation action, we devised the below categories to assign to SHOAL Priority Fishes (see the SHOAL Blueprint for selection criteria). The categories were formatted into either a Jotform or Google Sheet to collect participant responses. For both the Presence and Type fields, multiple options could be selected for an individual species.

© FRESHWATER ILLUSTRATED ROUNDTAIL CHUB (*GILA ROBUSTA*)

CONSERVATION ACTION CATEGORIES

CONSERVATION ACTION STATUS:

- Active targeted conservation action
- Passive protection (non-targeted action)
- Conservation action planned, but not implemented
- Little to no conservation action
- Unknown

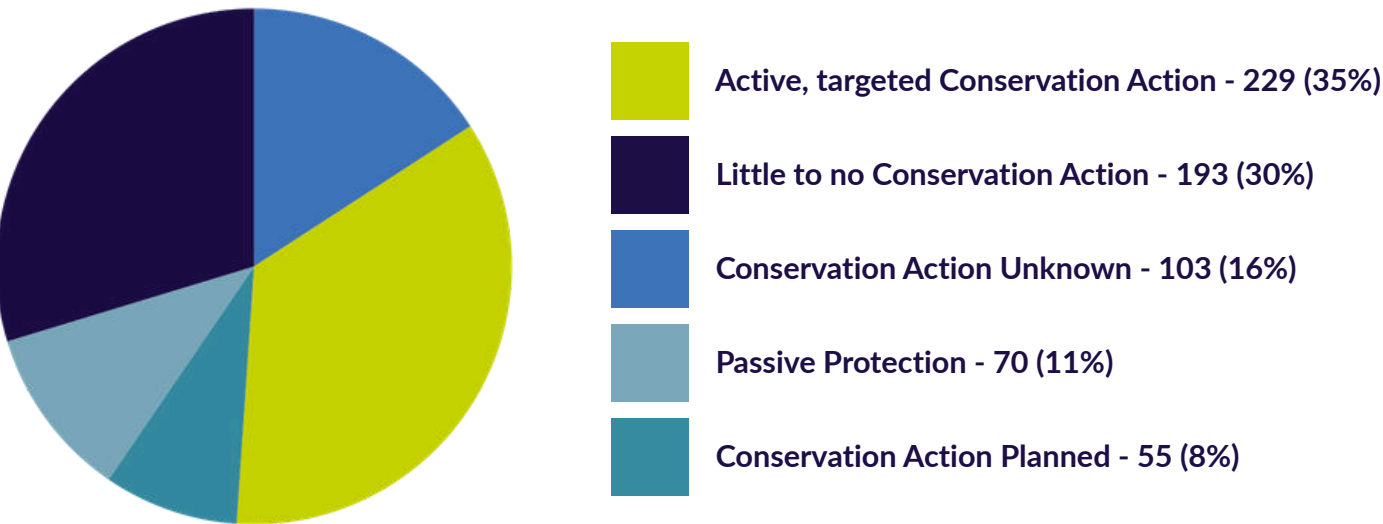
CONSERVATION ACTION TYPES:

- Ark-type breeding
- Community-based conservation interventions
- Community outreach & stewardship
- Conservation breeding for reintroduction
- Conservation translocation
- Direct habitat/site protection
- Engineering modifications
- Habitat quality improvement/control
- Habitat survey work and/or collection of eDNA assays
- Legislative restrictions on collection
- Unaware of specific conservation action

KEY FINDINGS

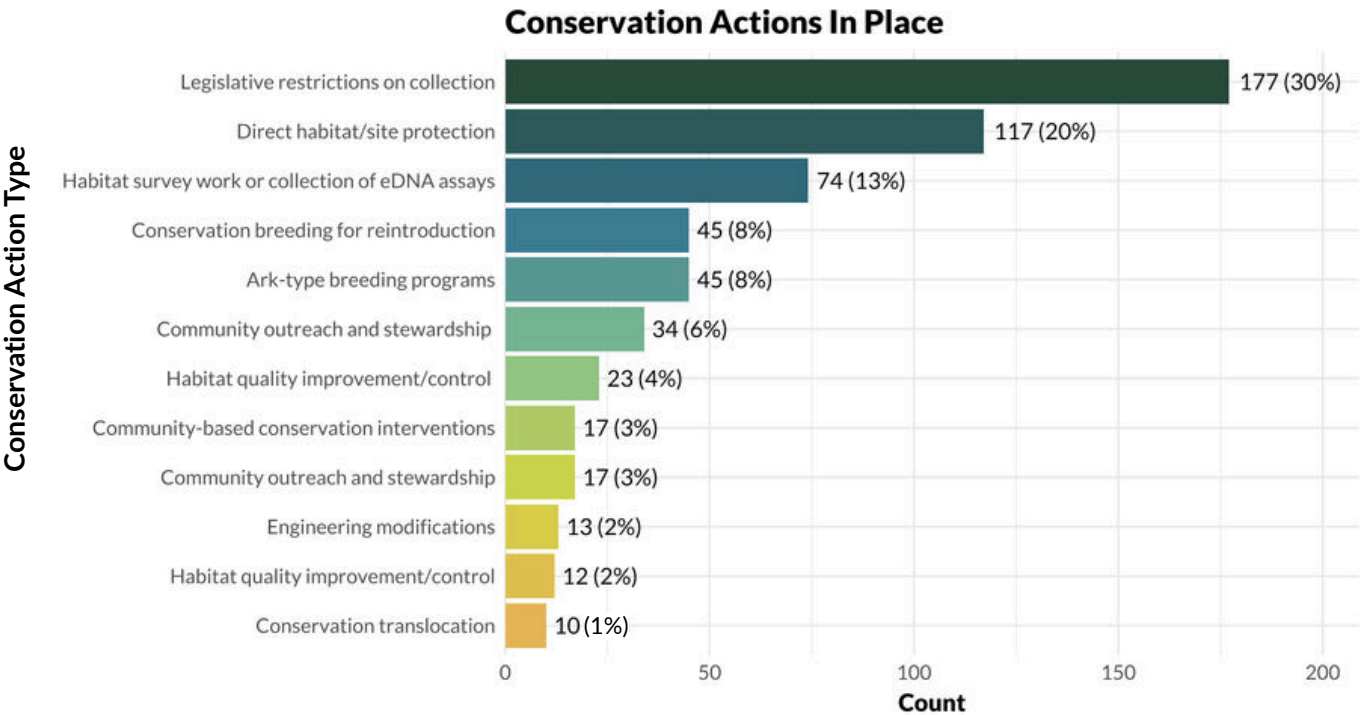
Of the **787 Critically Endangered Priority Fishes**, this collection effort recorded data for **644 (82%)**, providing the most up to date information for conservation action for Critically Endangered freshwater fishes we are aware of. For **193 species (30%)**, **there is still little to no action occurring**. Where action is occurring, the most common conservation action types recorded were **legislative restrictions on collection**, as well as and **direct habitat or site protection**. However, engineering modifications and conservation translocation were the least frequently recorded action types for CR Priority Fishes.

CONSERVATION ACTION STATUS



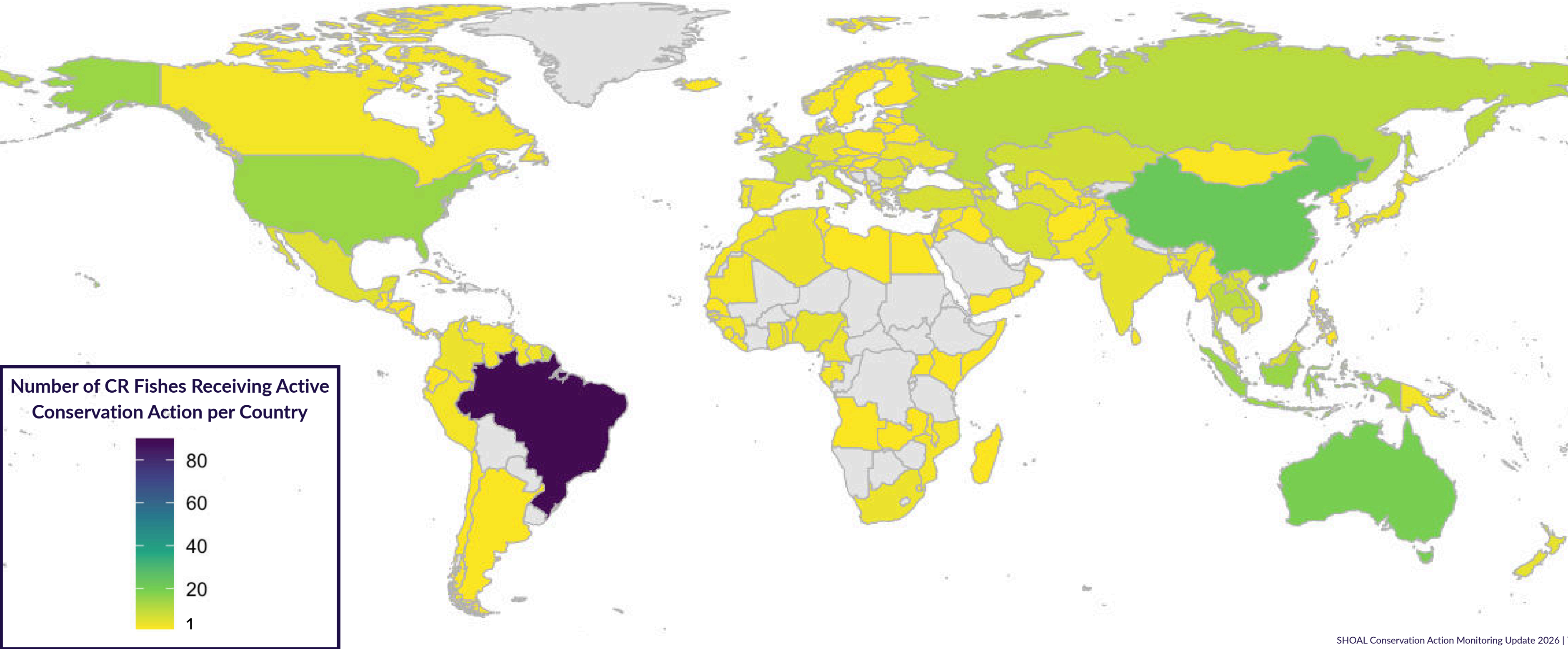
CONSERVATION ACTION TYPE*

*Participants could select multiple type options for each species. NAs and “No Action” responses were removed.



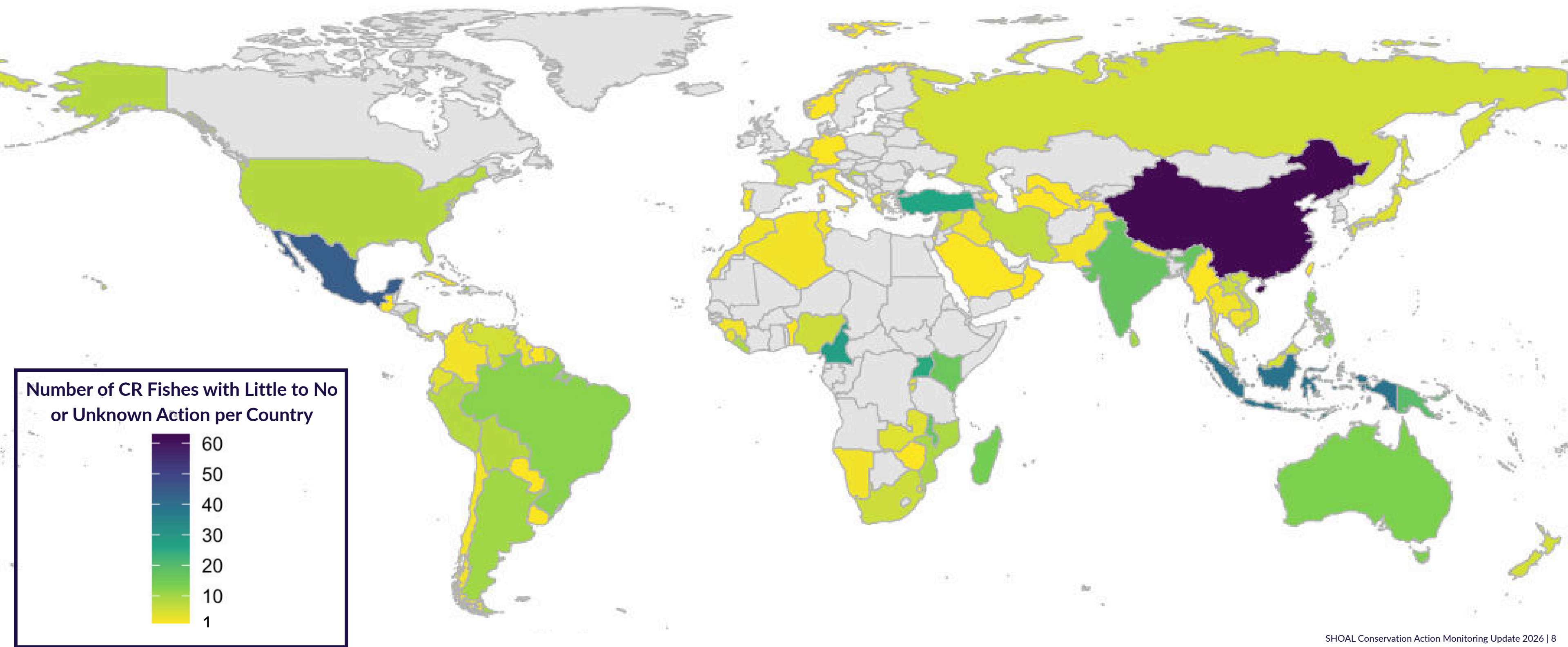
COUNTRIES WITH ACTIVE CONSERVATION ACTION

Globally, conservation action varies widely, but countries with a high density of CR species are mobilising some amount of conservation action. Many countries, including the United States, Brazil, and Australia, show dominant patterns of active conservation action. This map is coded by number of CR species per country with active conservation action occurring. For the case of many countries in Europe, their low count of species receiving action is not indicative of low action, but rather a low count of CR species in the country at all. Brazil has the highest number of CR species in the 1000 Fishes database, and most of these species receive at least direct legislative protection.

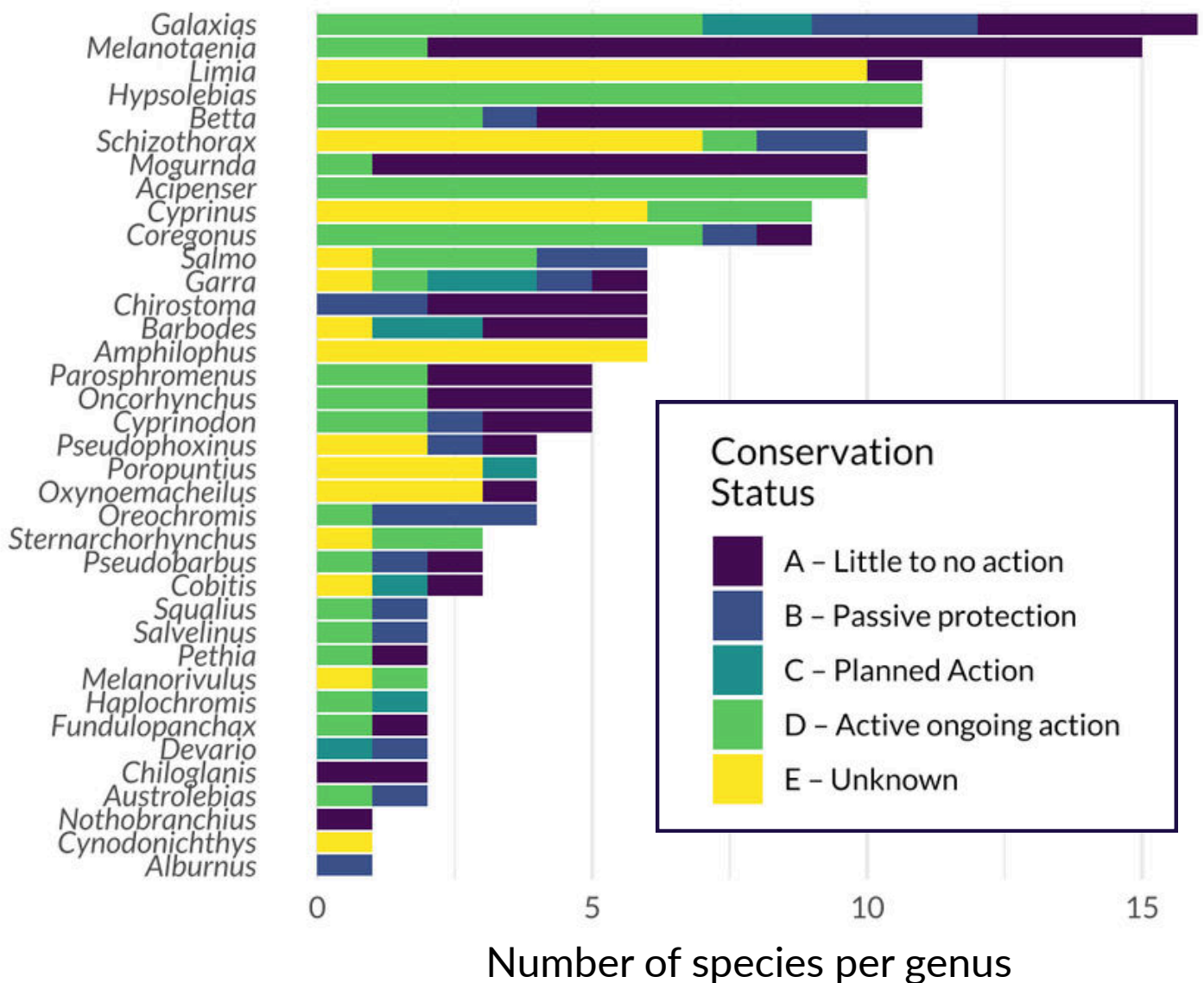


VISUALISING WHERE ACTION OR DATA ARE STILL NEEDED

This map depicts where conservation action is still needed for CR fishes. Responses visualised in this map are for species with no response of their conservation action or where respondents selected “Unknown” or “Little to No Action”. While China, Mexico, and Indonesia are all mobilising action for some CR species (see previous page), the sheer number of CR species per country means that many in-country still need targeted conservation action. Additionally, this map visualises gaps in SHOAL’s data, wherein there could be action, but it was not recorded in this data collection effort, so responses were either “NA” or “Unknown” for specific species.

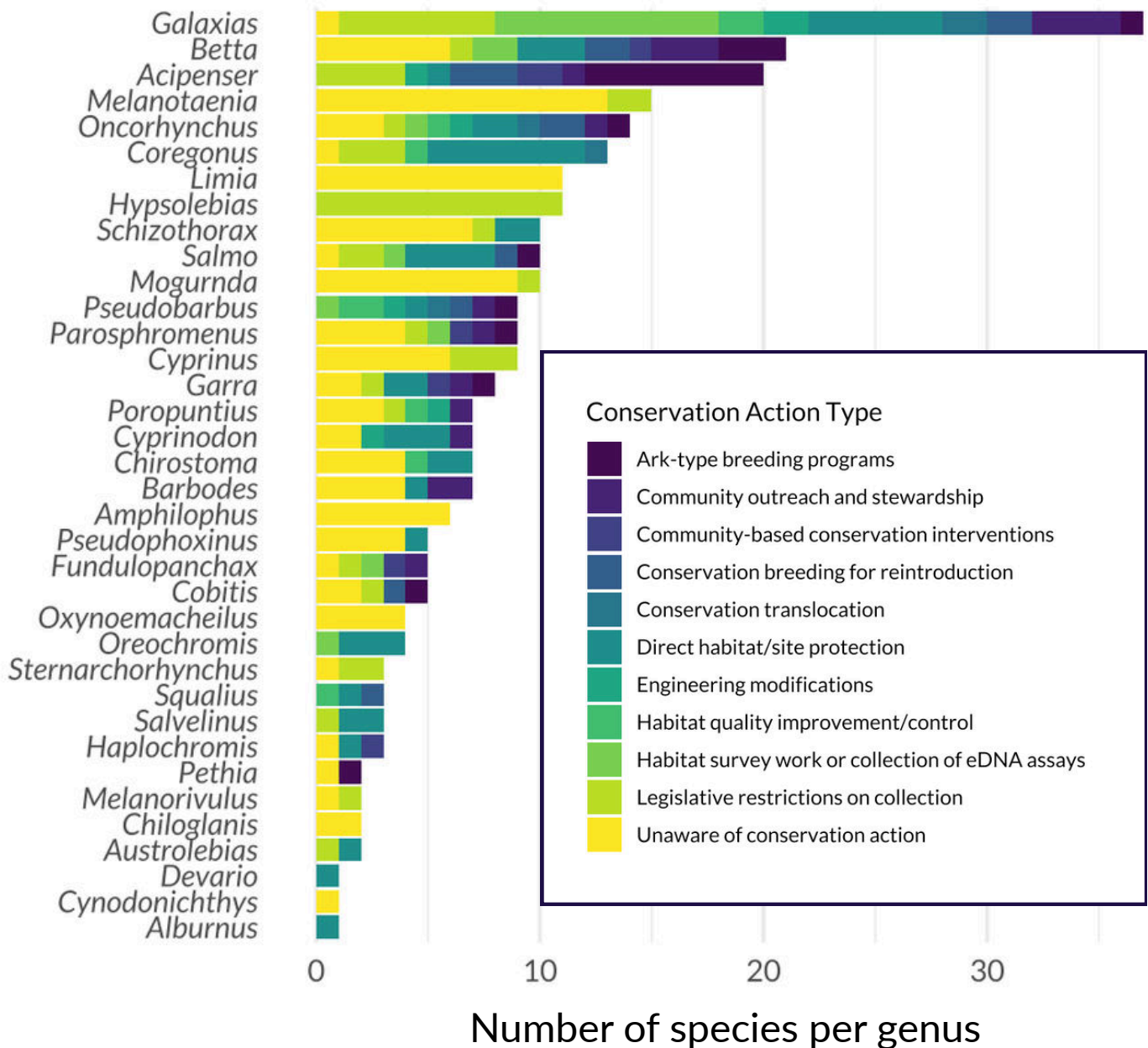


CONSERVATION ACTION STATUS IN PRIORITY GENERA



Conservation action varies widely across SHOAL's priority genera species, with 65% receiving active, ongoing action. *Galaxias* and *Melanotaenia* have the highest numbers of entries overall, with *Galaxias* species covering all known conservation action categories. *Melanotaenia*, however, dominated by little to no action. All surveyed *Hypsolebias* and *Acipenser* species were recorded as receiving active, targeted action. Conservation status remains largely unknown for *Limia*, *Schizothorax*, *Amphilophus*, and *Cynodonichthys*, while *Chiloglanis* and *Mogurnda* are dominated by little to no action.

CONSERVATION ACTION TYPE IN PRIORITY GENERA



Within the priority genera species, many have unknown specific conservation action. *Galaxias* species have the largest occurrence of species, as well as the most diverse array of conservation action types. *Betta* and *Acipenser* are dominated by habitat survey work/eDNA collection and ark-type breeding programs. Many priority genera are also noted for their legislative restrictions on collection and habitat protection. Community-based conservation actions are prevalent for several genera, however, there is low occurrence of habitat quality improvement or control.

COMPARING OUR DATA WITH THE IUCN RED LIST*

With respect to the colossal undertaking of an IUCN Red List assessment, we compared our findings on conservation action for critically endangered fishes with the conservation action data available on the Red List. Comparing our Conservation Action Monitoring categories with their IUCN Red List status shows how more frequent monitoring can differ from published assessments:

- For species we documented with **active conservation action**, the IUCN Red List reported that 124 species did not have action, while 86 did have conservation action.
- For species we documented with **little to no conservation action**, the IUCN Red List reported that 152 species did not have action, while 17 did have conservation action.
- For species we documented with **unknown conservation status**, the IUCN Red List reported that 85 species did not have action, while 7 did have conservation action.

Most species that 1000 Fishes Monitoring documents as under active conservation management are not reflected as "Yes" in the IUCN data, meaning there is no recent confirmation that conservation action is in place in their assessment records. This gap positions the 1000 Fishes Conservation Action Monitoring project as a continuous monitoring effort to flag changes in conservation status as they happen, through consulting global freshwater fish experts to reflect the most up-to-date conservation action knowledge.

*IUCN Red List data for this comparison was exported in June 2026

© FRESHWATER ILLUSTRATED RIVER CHUB (NOCOMIS MICROPOGON)



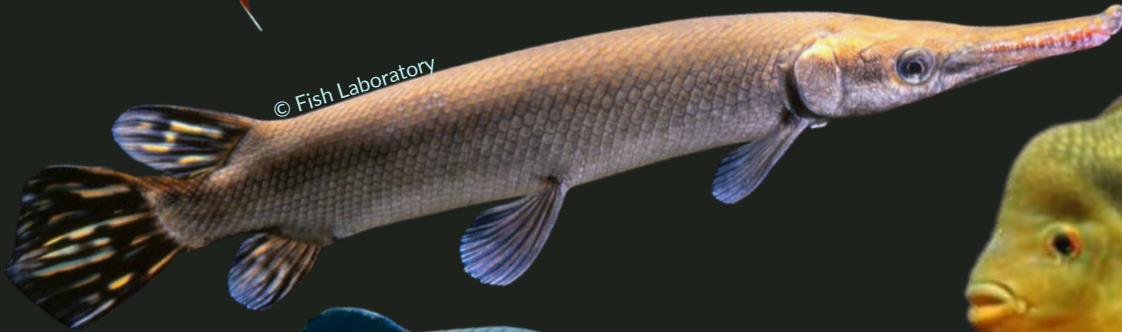
A small selection of Critically Endangered Priority Fishes



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