

sharks and providing evidence-based information to ensure the long-term survival of these iconic species.

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Lost and found: discovery of the painted swellshark *Cephaloscyllium pictum* in Timor-Leste

During a survey of Timor-Leste's deep-sea environment (water depth > 200 m), we have recorded the first live video footage of a painted swellshark *Cephaloscyllium pictum*. We conducted this survey using low-cost deep-sea cameras developed by the National Geographic Society Exploration Technology Lab (Giddens et al., 2021, *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 7, 601411).

Cephaloscyllium pictum was described in 2008 from five specimens collected at fish markets in Lombok and Bali, Indonesia (Last et al., 2008, *CSIRO Marine & Atmospheric Research Paper*, 022, 358). Four of the five specimens were collected in 2002, with the fifth collected at the Tanjung Luar fish landing site in Lombok on 12 July 2004. To our knowledge, this species has never been observed in the wild, and little is known about its ecology, habitat or behaviour.

On 17 and 18 November 2024, our deep-sea cameras captured footage of this species at two sites off Dili, Timor-Leste, at depths of 570 and 536 m. The habitat at both sites consisted of steep rocky slopes. At each site, the shark returned to the camera several times, and in the second instance the female shark interacted with the bait and made several passes in front of the camera. This is a new species record for Timor-Leste and extends the species' known range by > 1,100 km.

Although sharks and rays are protected in Timor-Leste, there is a dearth of information on their diversity and distribution, especially for deep-sea species. Recently, the IUCN Species Survival Commission Shark Specialist Group identified four Important Shark and Ray Areas along the north coast of Timor-Leste based on diver observations (sharkrayareas.org/e-atlas). However, in situ research is critical to inform conservation, especially for deep-sea species where diver observations are not possible.

Cephaloscyllium pictum is categorized as Data Deficient on the IUCN Red List because of the limited information

available. Approximately 33% of chondrichthyan species are threatened, with this number increasing to c. 40% if Data Deficient species (which may be threatened) are included (Dulvy et al., 2021, *Current Biology*, 31, 4773–4787). The discovery of the painted swellshark off Timor-Leste highlights the importance of modern, cost-effective technologies to survey the deep sea and locate these lost sharks before they vanish.

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Eels: uncertain impacts of proposed CITES listings




The European eel *Anguilla anguilla* is listed in CITES Appendix II, regulating its international trade. In October 2024, in preparation for the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Uzbekistan in 2025, the Directorate-General for the Environment of the European Commission sent letters to all CITES Parties within the range of the European eel and all other anguillids *Anguilla* spp., to inquire whether moving the species to Appendix I would help ensure its survival, and whether a genus-level listing in Appendix II would help ensure that international trade is both legal and sustainable.

Listing the European eel in Appendix I, which prohibits international commercial trade, would effectively terminate all commercial exploitation of the species, given that both eel fisheries and aquaculture rely on the international trade in glass eels (few countries harbour both a glass eel fishery and eel aquaculture). However, contribution to the species' survival could be minimal, as non-fishing threats remain. Eel aquaculture in Europe could transition to other species, such as the American eel *Anguilla rostrata*, which requires comparable aquaculture conditions. However, this species is already facing significant pressure from legal and illegal fishing. The relocation of European eel aquaculture to countries where there are fisheries is another potential consequence, although the associated costs would be high. Evaluation and improvement of EU-wide measures under the *European Council Regulation (EC) No 1100/2007 Establishing Measures for the Recovery of the Stock of*

European Eel could be more promising than implementing a new listing on Appendix I with unforeseen consequences.

A genus-level listing of *Anguilla* in Appendix II would aim to enhance the transparency of the global eel trade through mandatory reporting to the CITES database. Listing the genus rather than individual species is required as species identification is problematic both at the glass eel stage and as consumer products (e.g. grilled eel fillets). For trade to then continue, strict monitoring and control in compliance with CITES requirements would be needed. Following its listing on Appendix II, control measures were significantly improved for the European eel, helped by introduction of the *EU Action Plan Against Wildlife Trafficking* and Europol's lead on this from 2016 onwards. To maximize the positive impact of a genus-level listing, similar actions would be needed for the other 18 *Anguilla* species, many of which occur in countries with poor governance that lack control capacity. Listing of the European eel in Appendix II led to an increase in trafficking of the American eel (for example in the Caribbean, the USA and Canada), and further expansion and intensification of the illegal glass eel trade could be expected.

Before any changes to the CITES listings, a comprehensive assessment is needed to evaluate the expected impacts on stocks, eel aquaculture, legal trade and smuggling relative to conservation targets and risk analyses.

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New surveys reveal high biodiversity of Lake Télé, Congo

Lake Télé is an ovoid, endoreic 23 km² lake in northern Republic of the Congo. Surrounded by vast areas of swamp forest, Lake Télé is famous for its rounded shape (long thought to be the result of a meteorite, a theory now abandoned; Masters, 2010, *Journal of African Earth Sciences*, 58, 667–679) and the reputed presence of a dinosaur-like creature, the Mokele-Mbembe. The lake lies within the eponymous Lac Télé Community Reserve. This, in turn, is part of the largest peatland complex known in the tropics: the swamp forests of the Cuvette Centrale of the Congo Basin, which are of global importance for biodiversity and carbon stocks (Dargie et al., 2017, *Nature*, 542, 86–90).

Because of its remoteness, Lake Télé has been the subject of few scientific studies, the last one dating back to 1992

(Laraque et al., 1998, *Journal of Hydrology*, 207, 236–253). As a financial and technical partner of the Reserve since 2001, the Wildlife Conservation Society, together with the Ministère de l'Economie Forestière, organized two biodiversity surveys of the lake in July and August 2024. The first focused on the amphibians and reptiles of the swamp forests surrounding the lake, and the second on the fish community of the lake itself. A total of 37 amphibian and 38 reptile taxa were found, of which 26 (15 amphibians and 11 reptiles) were unidentified and could be new to science. Thirty-two fish species were recorded, including eight taxa that could not be identified to species. Water samples were collected from the lake for subsequent eDNA analysis. The fish community is dominated by the family Cichlidae, unlike that of the nearby river Likouala-aux-herbes, where Mormiridae is the most common family (Biloua et al., 2024, *Sustainability*, 16, 3353). Our findings confirm the high biodiversity of the lake and its conservation significance. Further surveys are scheduled in 2025, for insects and ungulates.

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New records of the clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* in the Qomolangma National Nature Reserve, Tibet

The clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* is categorized as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and has experienced significant population declines over the past decade, driven by habitat loss and overexploitation. Historically, the species was widely distributed across China (Smith & Xie, 2008, *Journal of Mammalogy*, 90, 520–521), but its estimated range in the country (calculated using the geographical range data published by IUCN) declined substantially during 2000–2020, from 1,211,284 km² (Grassman et al., 2016, *IUCN Red List*) to 62,199 km² (Gray et al., 2021, *IUCN Red List*). Petersen et al. (2020, *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 24, e01354) estimated that key habitat for the species in China has diminished by c. 97% during this period. Recent surveys indicate that the clouded leopard occurs in only four counties in China: Medog County in Tibet, and Gongshan, Yingjiang and Mengla Counties in Yunnan (Li et al., 2021, *Oryx*, 55, 177–180; Ma et al., 2022, *Biodiversity Science*, 30, 22349).

To study felid species in Qomolangma National Nature Reserve in Jilong County, a region characterized by a temperate semi-monsoon climate and located in the core region of the Himalayas, we deployed 200 infrared camera traps that operated continuously during August 2023–April