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Golden Mahseer: The River Fish, Not a Bird

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Golden Mahseer: The River Fish, Not a Bird

Anglers call it the “Tiger of the Indian Rivers”. It has fins, not wings. **UPSC 2022 asked which of four animals is not a bird.**



A Golden Mahseer (Tor putitora) from the Babai River. Photo by Charles J. Sharp, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

At a Glance

Four facts to hold on to.

01
Species

Tor putitora, a freshwater fish.

02
Status

IUCN Endangered.

03
Decline

Over 50% in 21 years.

04
UPSC 2022

The only non-bird option.

Mahseer A group of large South Asian river fish.
Ranching Releasing hatchery-bred young fish into rivers.
Fragmentation A river cut into pieces by dams.
Nocturnal Active at night.

A Fish, Not a Bird

Must Know

What the Golden Mahseer is

- The Golden Mahseer (*Tor putitora*) is a large freshwater fish.

- It lives in Himalayan rivers and is prized by anglers.
- It is **Endangered** on the IUCN Red List.
- Dams, pollution and overfishing threaten it.
- Sources: WWF-India and Wikipedia.

Not the other mahseer

- Indian Nightjar, Spoonbill and White Ibis are all birds.
- The Golden Mahseer is a different species from the Blue-finned Mahseer.
- The Golden Mahseer lives in Himalayan rivers, not the Cauvery.

> **Quick check 1.** The Golden Mahseer (Tor putitora) is a large freshwater fish, not a bird. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

The Three Real Birds

Good to Know

Nightjar, spoonbill and ibis

- **Indian Nightjar:** a small night bird with camouflaged feathers and a churring call.
- **Eurasian Spoonbill:** a wading bird with a long, flat, spoon-shaped bill. It sweeps the bill through shallow water to catch fish and crustaceans.
- **White Ibis:** a wading bird of wetlands and coasts. Indian ibis species include the Black-headed (Oriental White) Ibis.

> **Quick check 2.** The Eurasian Spoonbill is identified by its long, flat, spoon-shaped bill. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Exam Edge

Previous Year Questions

UPSC 2022 used the mahseer as the odd one out.

> **Quick check 3.** In UPSC 2022's question, the Golden Mahseer was the correct odd one out. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

A Real Decline, and Real Conservation

Great to Know

How far it has fallen

- The IUCN estimates the population fell by over 50% in about 21 years, or three generations.
- Dams, changed river flows, barriers to migration and overfishing all contribute.
- It is a state fish of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh, and of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir. Madhya Pradesh's state fish is a different species, the Tor mahseer (Tor tor), as the NFDB state-fish publication lists.
- Sources: IUCN Red List assessment and Wikipedia.

Bringing it back

- Conservation uses hatchery breeding and **ranching**: stocking rivers with hatchery-bred young.
- WWF-India surveyed the Kosi River in Uttarakhand.
- It is preparing a species management plan for a 30-kilometre stretch.
- Source: WWF-India.

> **Think it through: why is hatchery stocking alone not enough to save the Golden Mahseer?**
>
> Stocking adds numbers but fixes nothing. Dams still block migration, flows stay altered and fishing continues. New fish face the same pressures that cut the wild population. Recovery needs habitat restoration and fishing controls as well.

> **Quick check 4.** IUCN estimates show the Golden Mahseer population fell by over 50% in 21 years. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 5. WWF-India has worked on a species management plan for the Golden Mahseer on a stretch of the Kosi River. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 6. The Golden Mahseer and the Blue-finned Mahseer are the same species, found in the same river. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick Q&A

Is it a bird?

No, a fish.

Scientific name?

Tor putitora.

IUCN status?

Endangered.

Decline?

Over 50% in 21 years.

UPSC 2022 role?

The non-bird.

🎲 Practice: Golden Mahseer: The River Fish, Not a Bird

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Practice MCQs

1. Which of the following is not a bird?

A. White Ibis

B. Spoonbill

C. Golden Mahseer

D. Indian Nightjar

See answer ↓

2. The Golden Mahseer, sometimes called the "Tiger of the Indian Rivers," is best described as which of the following?

A. A protected big cat subspecies

B. A freshwater turtle species

C. An endangered Himalayan river fish

D. A migratory Himalayan bird of prey

See answer ↓

3. The Eurasian Spoonbill, one of the genuine birds contrasted with the Golden Mahseer in a UPSC question, is most easily identified by which feature?

A. Its curved, hooked beak

B. Its long, flat, spatula-shaped bill

C. Its webbed, paddle-shaped feet

D. Its bright red crest

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** The Golden Mahseer is a large Himalayan river fish, sometimes called the "Tiger of the Indian Rivers." The other three are all genuine birds. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** The Golden Mahseer is an endangered freshwater fish found in Himalayan rivers, threatened by dams, pollution, and overfishing. ↑ Q2
3. **B.** The Eurasian Spoonbill's long, flat, spoon-shaped bill, swung through shallow water to catch prey, is its most distinctive identifying feature. ↑ Q3

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3
4. **True.** ↑ 4
5. **True.** ↑ 5
6. **False.** ↑ 6

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