

FFSG PR item: Caribbean Freshwater Fishes

A comprehensive assessment of Caribbean freshwater fishes recently revealed that 45% of the 79 species assessed are threatened with extinction, bringing conservationists us one step closer to a global freshwater fish extinction assessment. The new assessment sheds light on common threats, including the spread of invasive species, pollution, deforestation, and agricultural development. It further highlights biodiversity hotspots that are in need of stronger protection, and serves as a strong basis for future conservation efforts in Caribbean freshwater ecosystems.

One species of particular interest to conservationists is the Cuban Gar, *Atractosteus tristoechus*, the largest species of freshwater fish in the Caribbean. These predatory giants were once widespread in Cuba’s Zapata Swamp, but drastic declines in abundance due to the invasive African catfish *Clarias gariepinus* has warranted their assessment as Critically Endangered. Another region is Lake Miragoane on the Tiburon Peninsula in southwestern Haiti, where an endemic species flock of livebearing fishes is threatened by widespread deforestation and watershed mismanagement.

The majority of freshwater fish diversity in the Caribbean is concentrated on the region’s largest islands of Cuba and Hispaniola, with fewer endemics in the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

For more information about the conservation status of this unique group of freshwater fishes, please visit www.iucnredlist.org to search by species, or read the full press release at www.shoalconservation.org/news/.

Table 1: Percentage of threatened species of Caribbean freshwater fishes by family.

Family	Total	EX	EW	CR	EN	VU	NT	LC	DD	% Threatened
Atherinopsidae	1				1					100.0
Lepisosteidae	1			1						100.0
Bythitidae	6			1	4		1			83.3
Cynolebiidae	2				1			1		50.0
Cyprinodontidae	10			1	3			6		40.0
Poeciliidae	47			13	3	2	6	17	6	38.3
Aplocheilidae	3				1		1	1		33.3
Cichlidae	4				1			3		25.0
Atherinidae	1							1		0.0
Characidae	1						1			0.0
Eleotridae	1								1	0.0
Erythrinidae	1								1	0.0
Loricariidae	1						1			0.0
Total	79	0	0	16	14	2	10	29	8	40.5

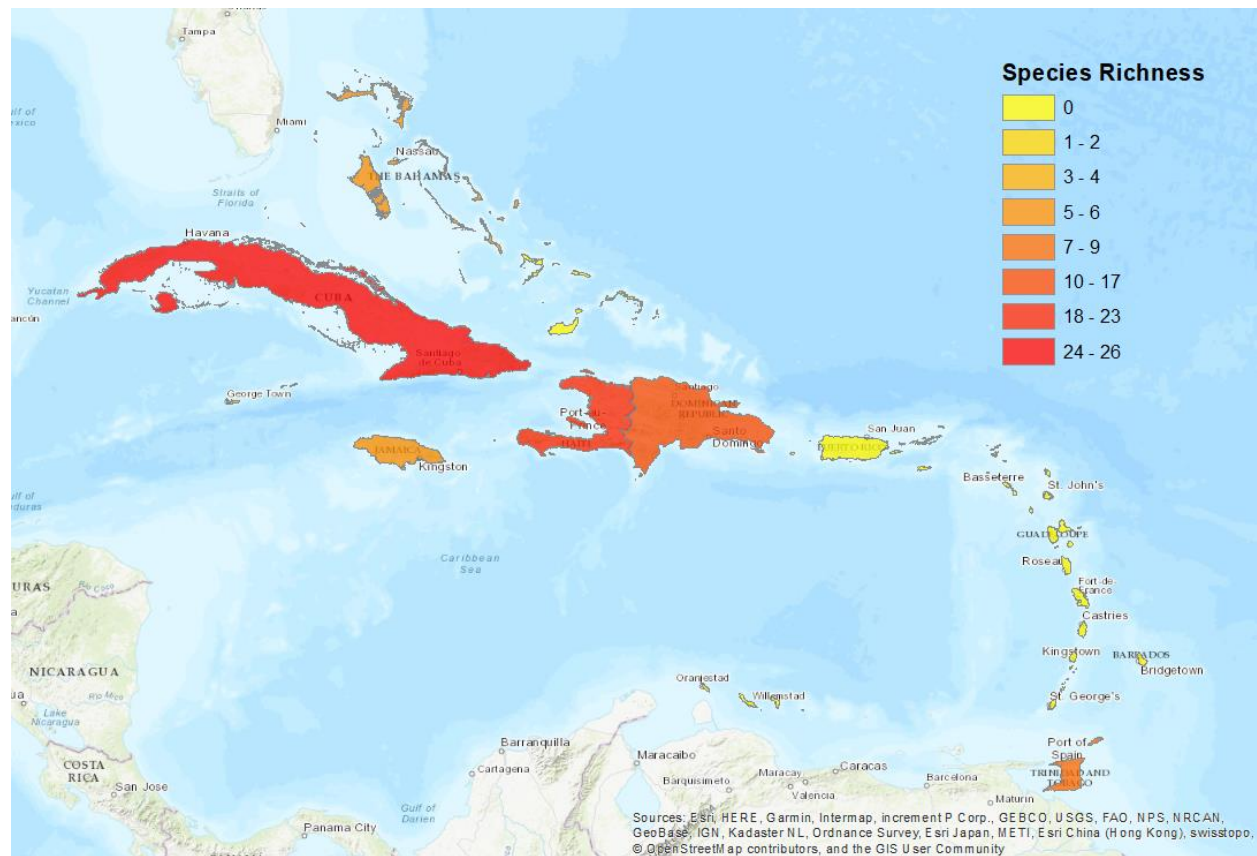


Figure 1: Species Richness of freshwater fishes in the Caribbean by country of occurrence.



Figure 2: *Quintana atrizona*, a Critically Endangered species of livebearing fish that is restricted to the Island of Youth off the coast of mainland Cuba. © Jose L. Ponce de Leon