



Researchers spotted up to ten vaquita last fall, suggesting that all may not be lost for the tiny porpoise.

CALL OF THE WILD

GLIMMER OF HOPE

All may not be lost for Mexico's imperiled vaquita. In April, Pritam Singh, Sea Shepherd's chairman of the board, announced that a research team had spotted seven or eight adult vaquitas, and one or two calves, during a five-day expedition in the Gulf of California last fall. With a population estimated at just 10 to 20 animals, the recent sightings offer a glimmer of hope for the critically endangered species.

The expedition was led by Sea Shepherd and the Mexican Navy, which have been working together since 2015 to prevent illegal fishing and remove fishing gear from inside the Vaquita Refuge, a federal protected area in the Gulf of California. The tiny porpoise is endemic to the gulf and entanglement in gillnets poses the greatest threat to the species' survival.

In more good news, research published in May indicates that the remaining vaquita population has enough genetic diversity to avoid inbreeding depression and stage a recovery — if the threat from gillnet fishing can be removed, that is.

FINDINGS

Naming Rights

The waters surrounding the Maldives archipelago teem with hundreds of fish species, many of them endemic. Local islanders probably have names for many of them, but bestowing formal, scientific names to these fish has always been the purview of foreign (read Western) scientists. Now for the first time, a colorful species of fish that's new to science has been given a name derived from the local Dhivehi language by a Maldivian scientist, Ahmed Najeeb.

Cirrhilabrus finifenmaa, or the rose-veiled fairy wrasse, is a distinct member of a family of largely bright colored fishes called wrasses. The species' name honors its bright pink shade, as well as the pink rose, Maldives' national flower. "*Finifenmaa*" means "rose" in Dhivehi.

A study describing the fish was published in March in the journal *ZooKeys*.

The fish was initially discovered by marine biologists in the 1990s. However, it was not scientifically described because researchers thought it was an adult version of another wrasse species, the red velvet fairy wrasse (*Cirrhilabrus rubrisquamis*).

In this new study, however, the researchers took a more detailed look at both adults and juveniles of the multicolored marvel, measuring and counting various features such as the color of adult males, the height of each spine supporting the fin on the fish's back, and the number of scales found on various body regions. This data, along with genetic analyses, were then compared to *C. rubrisquamis* specimens to confirm that *C. finifenmaa* is indeed a unique species.

Importantly, this revelation greatly reduces the known range of each wrasse, a crucial consideration when setting conservation priorities.

"It has always been foreign scientists who have described species found in the Maldives without much involvement from local scientists, even those [species] that are endemic to the Maldives," study coauthor Najeeb, a biologist at the Maldives Marine Research Institute, said in a statement. "This time it is different."

For the first time, a fish species discovered in the Maldives has been given a scientific name derived from the local Dhivehi language: *Cirrhilabrus finifenmaa*.



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