



RECOVERY OF PIRARUCU (ARAPAIMA GIGAS) POPULATIONS COULD FEATURE AMONG SHOAL'S PROJECTS.
PHOTO: JOHN DAWES

SHOAL TO THE RESCUE

Ornamental Fish International (OFI) and the Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association (OATA) are just two of the growing number of official organisations pledging support to Shoal, a new partnership set up on 1 March, 2019, with the aim of conserving freshwater fish species.

Although Shoal is not specifically an aquarium trade-related initiative, the fact that the ornamental aquatic industry actively supports the sustainable use of natural resources, ethical harvesting and conservation (hence the *Project Piaba* slogan: 'Buy a Fish, Save a Tree'), makes the decision to join a very sensible and logical one. Both these major trade organisations have joined as Strategic Partners and line up alongside a diverse group of like-minded bodies. These include the all-encompassing World Wildlife Fund, Global Wildlife Conservation and the Zoological Society of London, as well as more aquatically specific agencies like the Freshwater Fish Specialist Group, and more species-focussed associations like the *Parosphromenus* Project (which specialises in licorice gouramis of the genus *Parosphromenus*) and the Mahseer Trust (which has the mahseers – the giant cyprinids of the genera, *Tor*, *Hypselobarbus*, et al – as its flagship species).

Strategic Partners "comprise a group of institutions that contribute, in a coordinated way, towards the implementation of Shoal's principal objectives." These include the development of "sustainable solutions which ensure a future for freshwater fish, their habitats, and the people who depend upon them", all of which fall fairly and squarely within the philosophy and practice of today's aquarium industry.

Having said this, since over 90% of freshwater species found in trade are captive-bred, why should our sector wish to become involved with an organisation that, at least, in its initial stages, is prioritising non-trade projects, such as saving the endangered cyprinid, *Telestes croaticus*, in Croatia... or the equally endangered hump-backed mahseer (*Hypselobarbus mussulah* – formerly known as *Tor mussulah*) of Southern India... or helping to create a conservation plan for Sulawesi's Ancient Lakes?

The answer is quite simple and, since OATA and several of its member businesses have been involved in the actual creation of Shoal, it would seem most appropriate to allow Dominic Witmee, OATA's Chief Executive, to explain: "The conservation of freshwater aquatic species globally is very important... for biodiversity, for the livelihoods of those that depend on freshwater fisheries around the world, and even for our own health and wellbeing. Our industry relies on a sustainable source of live fish for the aquarium trade. While many of the tropical freshwater fish within the home aquarium industry are captive reared it is important to be able to access sustainably caught wild fish to refresh genetic stock... I believe as an industry we can make a positive contribution to the long-term conservation of freshwater fish by supporting sustainable practices and projects to conserve local populations. It therefore seems natural to support this new fundraising platform."

Of course, it is still far too early to assess how effective or otherwise Shoal will prove to be in achieving its targets, or to see how many other trade organisations besides OATA and OFI will join the initiative. Nonetheless, the mere fact that both these important trade bodies are backing the project gives us cause for optimism. ■

FURTHER READING:

For full details regarding Shoal, visit: www.shoalconservation.org
For further information regarding OATA's posting on Shoal, visit: www.ornamentalfish.org and click on the Latest News section.