New Freshwater Fish Species in the Western Ghats

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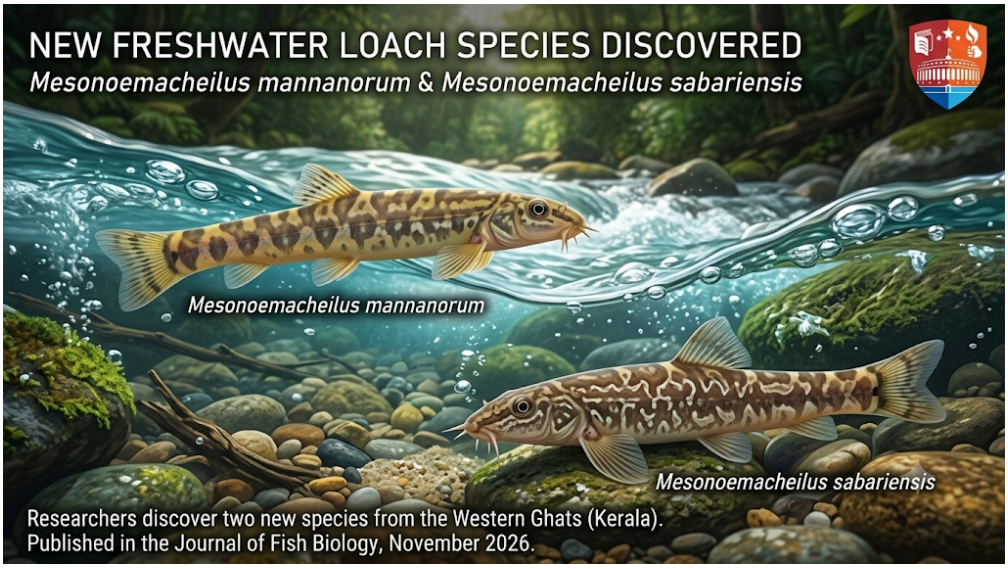
Why in News?

Recently, researchers described two new freshwater loach species from the Western Ghats, published in the Journal of Fish Biology in November 2026.

- **Discovered species Scientific name –**
  - Mesonoemacheilus mannanorum
  - Mesonoemacheilus sabariensis;
- **Family** – Nemacheilidae.
- **M. mannanorum** – Recorded from a headwater stream of the Periyar River; its name honours the ***Mannan tribal community***.
- **M. sabariensis** – Recorded from a headwater stream of the Pamba River, in the Sabari Hills region; the name refers to the Sabari Hills.
- **Taxonomic evidence** – The species were distinguished using morphological characters and multi-locus molecular data, including mitochondrial COI and cytochrome-b, and nuclear RAG1 sequences.
- **Genus distribution** – Following the description, Mesonoemacheilus comprises 11 species, all endemic to rivers draining the Western Ghats Biodiversity Hotspot.
- At least 15 species of freshwater fish are endemic to the various mountain streams draining the Periyar-Cardamom Hills, with the Periyar Tiger Reserve alone harbouring 10 species found nowhere else in the world.
- **Ecological significance** – Loaches are small, bottom-dwelling freshwater fishes; their presence and diversity can provide clues about the condition of stream habitats.



Quick Facts

Western Ghats & Loaches
• **Western Ghats** – A UNESCO World Heritage Site (inscribed in 2012) and one of the world's major biodiversity hotspots. • **Biodiversity hotspot criteria** – A region must have at least 1,500 endemic vascular plant species and have lost at least 70% of its original natural vegetation. • **Nemacheilidae** – A family of freshwater fishes commonly referred to as stone loaches. • **Habitat** – Many hill-stream loaches inhabit clear, flowing streams and riverbeds, often among stones and gravel. • **Conservation angle** – Freshwater biodiversity is vulnerable to pollution, dams, water abstraction, sand mining and changes in river flow.

Reference

The New Indian Express - Two new loaches of the genus Mesonoemacheilus from the Western Ghats (DOI)

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
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