Gangaichthys indonepalicus: The First Underground Fish of the Ganga Basin

Study/source context: Descriptive paper: ZooKeys, 11 August 2026; science reports: 17-18 August 2026 | Actual publication date: 20 October 2026

Environment/Science: New species/genus discovery, groundwater ecosystem

News Context:

According to a descriptive paper published in the scientific journal ZooKeys on 11 August 2026, researchers described a new species, Gangaichthys indonepalicus, of the earthworm eel family (Chaudhuriidae) from the alluvial groundwater areas (alluvial aquifers) of Bihar – it is a new species and also a new genus. According to Pensoft/EurekAlert (17 August 2026), this is the first stygobitic fish recorded from the Ganga basin (Indo-Gangetic plain) – that is, one living entirely in underground water.

The discovery began in 2024 with a TikTok video in which an unusual small fish was seen coming out of a borewell near the India-Nepal border. According to EurekAlert, the researchers took samples by manually pumping thousands of litres of water from handpumps/borewells in Bihar: the first specimen was found after about 2000 litres of pumping (it was damaged), and the second – intact – specimen was found after pumping about 500 litres more from the same borewell, and was later declared the holotype.

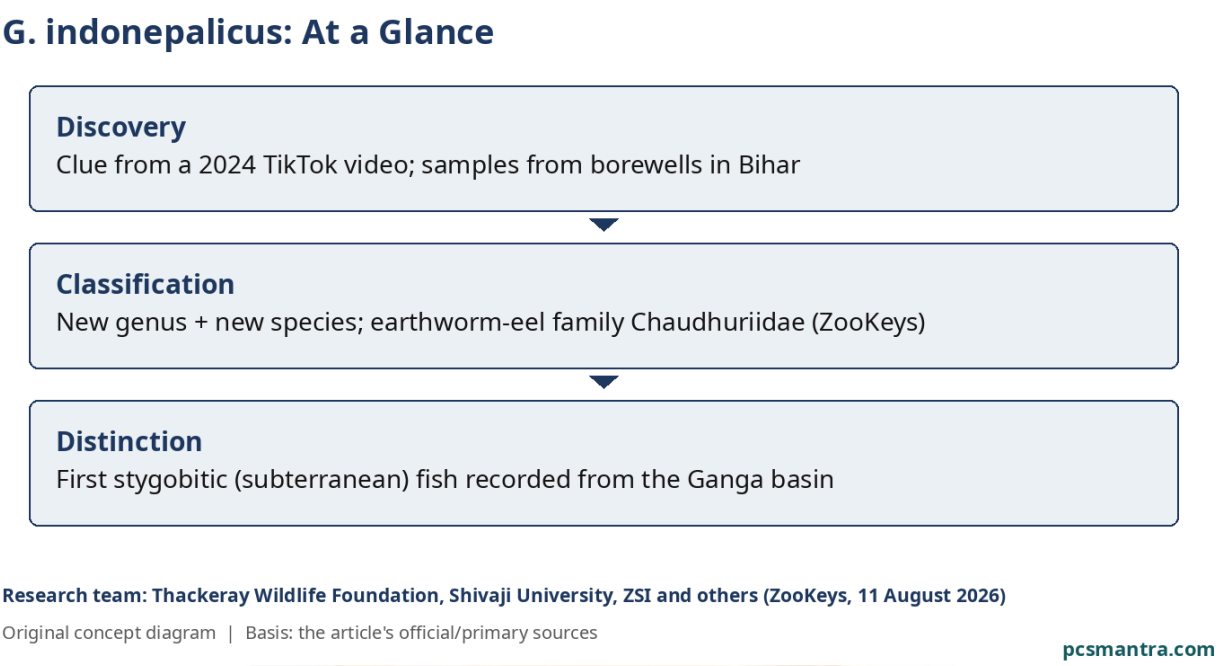
G. indonepalicus: At a Glance

Discovery: clue from a 2024 TikTok video; samples from borewells of Bihar

Classification: new genus + new species; earthworm eel family Chaudhuriidae (ZooKeys)

Feature: first stygobitic (underground) fish recorded from the Ganga basin

Research team: Thackeray Wildlife Foundation, Shivaji University, ZSI and others (ZooKeys, 11 August 2026)



If the letters in the figure look small, tap the figure to open it larger and zoom.

Original concept diagram based on the article's original sources.

Features and Classification:

According to the Pensoft press release, the fish is about four centimetres long and shows adaptations to life in complete darkness: reduced (small) eyes covered by skin, an unpigmented translucent body and an apparent absence of ribs. Micro-CT scanning and genetic analysis confirmed that it is an entirely separate genus within the family Chaudhuriidae.

The study team included researchers from the Thackeray Wildlife Foundation (Mumbai), Shivaji University (Kolhapur), the Shanghai Synchrotron Radiation Facility (Chinese Academy of Sciences) and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI, Gopalpur-on-Sea).

Naming:

According to the researchers, the genus name Gangaichthys means "fish of the Ganga" – in the context of the water of the Ganga river, food security, livelihood and religious importance.

The species name indonepalicus indicates that the species was found in the India-Nepal border region – this shows its distribution.

Prelims: Practice Questions

Question 1. Which is the correct statement regarding the significance of Gangaichthys indonepalicus?

(a) It is the first cave fish found in the caves of Meghalaya

(b) Described in ZooKeys (11 August 2026), it is the first stygobitic (underground-water) fish recorded from the Ganga basin – both a new genus and a new species

(c) It is a marine eel found in the Bay of Bengal

(d) It is an already known fish that has been rediscovered

View Answer and Reason
Answer: (b). According to the ZooKeys descriptive paper and the Pensoft press release (17 August 2026), it is the first stygobitic fish of the Indo-Gangetic plain/Ganga basin; it is not marine, but a species of underground water (alluvial aquifer).

Question 2. Which is the correct statement regarding the naming of this fish?

(a) The genus name was given after a scientist

(b) The species name is after the village where the borewell was

(c) The name points to the TikTok platform

(d) The genus name Gangaichthys means "fish of the Ganga" and the species name indonepalicus reflects its India-Nepal border distribution

View Answer and Reason
Answer: (d). According to Pensoft/EurekAlert (17 August 2026), Gangaichthys = "fish of the Ganga"; indonepalicus was chosen because it was found in the India-Nepal border region.

Question 3. Which are the adaptations recorded in this fish for underground life?

(a) Bright colour and large eyes

(b) Reduced eyes covered by skin, an unpigmented translucent body and an apparent absence of ribs

(c) A bioluminescent surface

(d) Well-developed wing-like pectoral fins

View Answer and Reason
Answer: (b). According to the Pensoft press release, the adaptations to complete darkness include reduced eyes covered by skin, an unpigmented translucent body and an apparent absence of ribs.

Sources:

ZooKeys 1289: Gangaichthys indonepalicus – new genus and species, 11 August 2026

Pensoft/EurekAlert: Rare underground eel discovered through a TikTok video, 17 August 2026

India Today: New underground eel species discovered in Bihar, 18 August 2026