

WORLD'S BIGGEST FRESHWATER FISH NETTED IN CAMBODIA

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Giant stingray tagged and released back into Mekong River for further research

PHNOM PENH

A FISHERMAN on the Mekong River in Cambodia has hooked the biggest freshwater fish ever recorded, scientists said — a 300kg stingray.

The giant freshwater stingray, which measured 4m from snout to tail, was caught last week and released back into the wild after being fitted with a tag to track its behaviour.

The monstrous bottom-dweller beat the previous record for biggest recorded freshwater fish, held by a 293kg Mekong giant catfish caught in Thailand in 2005, the United States-funded Wonders of the Mekong research project said.

The stingray, caught in Stung Treng province in northern Cambodia, was more than twice the weight of an average lowland gorilla, the experts said.

"In 20 years of researching giant fish in rivers and lakes on six continents, this is the largest freshwater fish that we've encountered or that's been documented anywhere worldwide," Zeb Hogan, a fish biologist lead-



A 300kg giant freshwater stingray being released into the Mekong River in Stung Treng province, Cambodia, last week. AFP PIC

ing the Wonders of the Mekong project, said yesterday.

"This is an absolutely astonishing discovery, and justifies efforts to better understand the mysteries surrounding this species and the incredible stretch of river where it lives."

The researchers fitted an acoustic tag to the stingray before returning it to the river, to try to learn more about the secretive

creature's elusive behaviour.

Last month, an endangered giant freshwater stingray measuring 4m long and weighing 180kg was also hooked by a fisherman in the same province.

The stingray is not the only giant lurking in the muddy waters — the giant catfish and giant barb also reach up to 3m long and 270kg in weight.

Scientists have warned that

plastic waste threatens wildlife even in the deepest stretches of the Mekong, along with "ghost nets", abandoned by fishers but still able to snare fish.

The famous waterway feeds 60 million people through its basin and tributaries.

But environmentalists have long voiced concerns about dam building along the Mekong River that will destroy fish stocks. **AFP**