

Killer Catfish Stalk Humans

Killer goonch catfish behind long-standing mystery.

By David Alderton

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British biologist Jeremy Wade with one of the goonch catfish. Courtesy of Five. A chilling series of fatal attacks on people living alongside the Great Kali River in the border area between India and Nepal have been reported over the past 20 years. In 2007, an 18-year-old boy was dragged down into the river by a creature described as resembling an elongated pig. As in previous cases no traces of him or his clothing were ever found, reinforcing the local view that his death was caused by a river monster.

British biologist Jeremy Wade recently investigated the mystery for a television documentary commissioned as part of Five's Nature Shock series. Having ruled out other possibilities such as crocodiles and after surveying the scene, Wade and a companion went into the water to see what might be lurking there. They were confronted by a number of very large goonch catfish (*Bagarius yarelli*).

Wade managed to catch a large example, measuring 6 feet in length and weighing 161 pounds.

"If that got hold of you, there would be no getting away", Wade said, convinced that there are even bigger individuals lurking in these waters.

Catfish tend to be one of the scavengers of the aquatic world, and this helps to explain the events which have unfolded in this particular river. It is well-known that predatory creatures ranging from big cats to crocodiles and various sharks can acquire the taste for human flesh. It would seem that the goonch catfish is no different, although the explanation for what has turned these catfish into killers is quite macabre.

In this Hindu region, the charred remains of bodies from funeral pyres have been tipped into the river. The catfish are thought to have benefitted from this source of food. They have grown to a much larger size than normal and now when they are hungry, they are seeking human prey themselves.