

In the Murky Waters of the Yangtze, Scientists Use an Underwater Drone to Find Hope for a 100-Million-Year-Old Species

A CHASING X underwater drone and underwater ROV helped researchers document endangered Chinese sturgeon in one of the Yangtze River's toughest habitats.

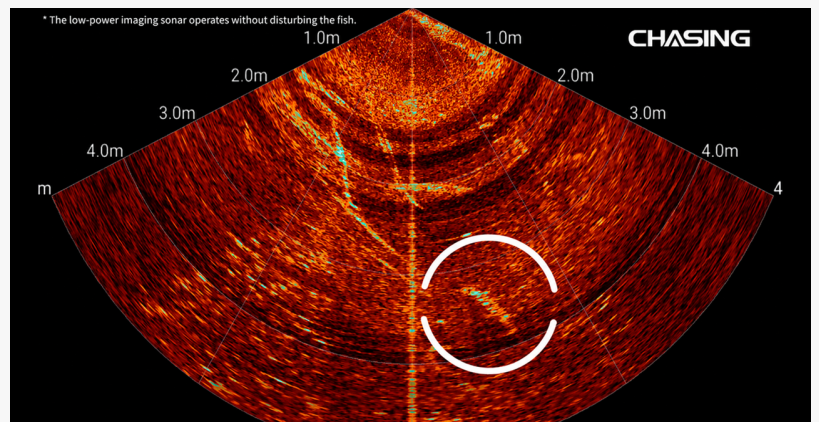
HOUSTON, TX, UNITED STATES, June 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Long before dinosaurs disappeared and long before humans walked the Earth, Chinese sturgeon were already navigating the rivers of Asia. For more than 100 million years, the species survived ice ages, geological upheavals, and mass extinctions. Today, however, its greatest threat comes not from nature, but from the modern world. Once abundant throughout the Yangtze River system, the Chinese sturgeon has become one of the world's most endangered freshwater fish. Sightings are rare. Opportunities to observe the species in its natural environment are even rarer.

That is why a recent conservation mission in the upper Yangtze River carried significance far beyond a routine scientific survey.

Over four days in April, researchers working at the Xianglutan spawning grounds in Sichuan Province undertook a challenging effort to better understand habitat conditions critical to the species' recovery. Battling strong currents, poor visibility, and rapidly changing river conditions,



A rare Chinese sturgeon swims through the murky waters of the Yangtze River as the CHASING X underwater drone captures underwater footage during a conservation research mission in April 2026.



Using a BP750 imaging sonar integrated with the CHASING X underwater ROV, researchers identified a Chinese sturgeon target beneath the Yangtze River despite extremely limited underwater visibility.

the team deployed a [CHASING X underwater drone](#), a professional remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV), to explore what remained hidden beneath the surface. What they found offered a rare moment of optimism.

The mission successfully documented three released Chinese sturgeon individuals and captured underwater imagery of a species that many scientists fear could disappear without sustained conservation action. For researchers involved in the project, the footage represented more than scientific data. It represented proof that one of Earth's oldest surviving fish species is still fighting to endure.



Researchers deploy the CHASING X remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV) at the Xianglutan spawning grounds in Sichuan, where scientists conducted ecological monitoring of endangered Chinese sturgeon.

The River Keeps Its Secrets

The Yangtze River is often described as the cradle of China's freshwater biodiversity. Yet beneath its surface lies an environment that can be extraordinarily difficult to study.

At the Xianglutan spawning grounds, water depths averaged 11 meters, while some channels extended beyond 20 meters. Heavy rainfall upstream increased river velocities to as much as 2.5 meters per second. In certain areas, visibility fell below half a meter.

To a diver, the conditions can be dangerous. To a scientist, they can be frustrating. To an endangered species, they provide both refuge and uncertainty.

Traditional survey methods often struggle under such conditions, limiting researchers' ability to gather the information needed to assess habitat quality and monitor recovery efforts.

The challenge facing the team was straightforward in theory but extraordinarily difficult in practice:

How do you observe a disappearing species in a river that reveals almost nothing?

When Humans Could Not Go, Technology Could

The answer came in the form of [underwater robotics](#).

Throughout the expedition, researchers deployed the CHASING X [underwater ROV](#) to navigate deep channels, investigate underwater terrain, and conduct systematic ecological surveys.

As weather conditions worsened, the mission became increasingly dependent on technology capable of seeing beyond what the human eye could detect.

The integration of BP750 imaging sonar allowed researchers to identify targets even as visibility deteriorated. Combined sonar and optical surveys eventually revealed multiple Chinese sturgeon targets within the spawning grounds.

By the mission's conclusion, three released sturgeon individuals had been successfully

documented.

In a river known for concealing its wildlife, researchers had managed to briefly pull back the curtain.

More Than a Technology Story

The significance of the mission extends beyond a single species.

Across the world, freshwater ecosystems are experiencing increasing pressure from habitat degradation, pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss. Scientists require new tools capable of monitoring these environments safely, efficiently, and with minimal ecological disturbance.

Underwater robotics are emerging as one of those tools.

Throughout the mission, the CHASING X operated as both an underwater drone and a remotely operated underwater vehicle, allowing researchers to conduct surveys in areas that would have been difficult or unsafe for divers to access. The deployment demonstrates how modern underwater ROV technology is becoming an increasingly important tool for environmental monitoring, conservation science, and freshwater ecosystem research.

For the Chinese sturgeon, every confirmed observation contributes valuable insight into survival, movement patterns, and habitat conditions.

For conservationists, every new piece of information strengthens the foundation for future recovery efforts.

And for a species that has already survived 100 million years of Earth's history, every glimpse beneath the surface matters.

About CHASING

CHASING is a global leader in underwater robotics and professional underwater drone technology, specializing in remotely operated underwater vehicles (ROVs) for commercial, industrial, and scientific applications.

Its underwater ROV solutions are deployed in more than 100 countries and regions worldwide across a wide range of mission-critical operations, including:

Offshore Inspection

Underwater Infrastructure Inspection

Emergency Search & Recovery

Port, Hull & Dock Maintenance

Aquaculture & Fisheries

Underwater 3D Photography & Exploration

By combining advanced imaging, intelligent mobility, and modular payload integration, CHASING helps organizations safely access, inspect, document, and understand underwater environments that would otherwise remain beyond reach.

For more information, visit www.chasing.com.

Young

CHASING INNOVATION TECH CO.,LTD

+86 159 2852 4095

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