On May 14th, 2020, the World Fish Migration Foundation hosted a 24-hour global webinar on the statuses and trends of swimways (the migratory routes of migratory fish) around the world.

The webinar brought together freshwater experts from across the globe ranging from scientists, NGO affiliates, scholars and indigenous representatives. Over 50 speakers voiced the urgent need for more conservation measures to revive dwindling fish populations. The webinar was split into nine sessions, each representing a region of the globe. Sessions followed the path of the sun, from New Zealand to Hawaii. Participants entered and exited the webinar as they pleased, some stayed for as many as seven of the nine sessions. With over 2000 attendees, this webinar was a huge success and an excellent way to kick off our global celebrations of fish and rivers for World Fish Migration Day.

Unique Times Call for Unique Actions:

Due to restrictions from COVID-19, World Fish Migration Day 2020 was postponed from May 16th to October 24th. Around the world, hundreds of events ranging from international conferences to small river outings were forced to cancel or postpone after months of planning. We decided to do something special to keep migratory fish and river warriors feeling connected and inspired, even during this uncertain time. After discussions with the team, we settled on an unprecedented idea: a 24-hour webinar marathon, encompassing as much of the globe as we could. The hope was to keep the momentum going towards World Fish Migration Day, as well as provide a large platform for freshwater experts around the world to share information about the status of migratory fish and rivers.
The Numbers

24 hours
62 presenters
6 continents
100+ countries
2,000+ participants
THE SESSIONS

OCEANIA
Photo from A Māori perspective on migratory fish passage from Coastal Lakes/Lagoons, with a focus on Te Roto o Wairewa (Lake Forsyth), presentation by Iaean Cranwell, New Zealand.

East Asia
Photo from Wonders of the Mekong program, presented by Seila Chea, Cambodia.

Central and South Asia
Photo from The Amur River and the protection of its salmon, presented by Olga Cheblukova, Russia.

West Asia
Photo from Western Asia Status and Trends presented by Jörg Freyhof, Germany.

Africa
Photo from Africa status and trends: River restoration and fish migration in Africa, presented by Gordon O’Brien, South Africa.
THE SESSIONS

**Europe**
Photo from Restoring 3000 km of free-flowing river in Estonia. Meet the biggest European river restoration project presented by Külli Tammur, Estonia.

**South America**
Photo from The Baker and other large rivers in Chilean Patagonia presented by Claudio Meier, USA/Chile.

**Mexico and Central America**
Photo from Rivers and fishes of a biodiversity hotspot in the Northern Neotropics presented by Caleb McMahan and Diego Elias, USA and Guatemala.

**USA and Canada**
Photo from The River herrings are back. Local experiences from Plymouth (Mass) after removing 6 dams presented by David Gould, USA.
Arjan Berkhuysen, Managing Director of the World Fish Migration Foundation

“Over 24 hours, I heard from people all over the world, who are doing their utmost to make the world a better place for migratory fish and, in the end, for us all. There were stories of decline and disaster, but also so many stories of hope and restoration. There are thousands of people asking global policymakers to include life underwater when making future plans. It’s time we are heard, and I’m glad we can support this by bringing people living along global swimways together.”

Derek Dzousa, Mahseer Trust & All India Game Fishing Association

“What can we do to save our fish? We have to work with together to create a holistic approach and raise awareness about their value to our societies. This webinar was a great way to get started on this work.”
Dr Gordon O’Brien, Aquatic Ecologist from the University of Mpumalanga

“This webinar is the first time stakeholders of migratory fish in Africa have come together from across the continent to represent almost all of the continent to talk about migratory fish that move across Africa. With this start, we hope to be able to think, talk and act on issues that affect these fishes, their ecosystems and vulnerable African people who depend on them. As a start, we need not only to react and continue to work on issues affecting migratory fishes but to be pro-active and find populations of important species that have intact migrations and preserve them!”
HIGHLIGHTS

From New Zealand to Hawaii, nearly two-thousand people flooded into the webinar. There were 62 presentations from speakers around the world.

Participants were engaged, answering polls, asking questions in the Q&As, and introducing themselves in the chat. Each speaker took us on a journey through their local swimway. We learned about the damming of the Amazon River in Peru, the migration of freshwater snails in Puerto Rico, dam removals from South Africa to Massachusetts, and the wondrous giants of the Mekong River in Southeast Asia. It was incredible to watch connections from across the globe as scientists and practitioners took inspiration for their own projects from rivers half a world away.

Through the feedback survey and other responses sent our way, our team learned about the various ways this webinar inspired, educated, and connected people who love fish and rivers around the world!

Profession of webinar attendees

Professor  Freshwater ecologist  Engineer  Specialist  Fisheries  Biologist
Aquatic Ecologist  Water Researcher  Lecturer  Fisheries
student Scientist  PhD Student  Biologist  management
Environmental Science  Fish  Project manager
Conservation  Marine Consultant  Freshwater  Officer  Research
Has this webinar inspired you to take more action in your country/region to protect migratory fish and rivers?

- Yes: 65%
- No: 16%
- Other (please specify): 19%

How valuable was the information provided to you?

- Very valuable: 52%
- Extremely valuable: 21%
- Somewhat valuable: 26.5%
- Not at all valuable: 0.5%
- Not so valuable: 19%
WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

“I’ve really never experienced anything like it, and am still awestruck by it, even some days later. The fact that it ran so seamlessly, for 24 hours, relying on internet connections from so many parts of the world, is truly amazing.”
- Ian Harrison, Freshwater Specialist at Conservation International

“...I found the webinar Marathon truly inspirational. And a relatively easy and quick way to learn about current projects around the globe. Relatively easy as in “no need to take a ‘round the world plane-ticket” It must have been quite a job to make this all happen and to get everyone lined-up. Thank you very much WFMF!”
- anonymous, from the survey

“It was professional development for me. It also exposed and inspired me to see other Scientists of Color and Indigenous scholars that are doing work in the freshwater, migrating fish, and community realms. I definitely took note of organizations and initiatives I wasn’t aware of, to follow them online...looking forward to watching the regions I missed that I really wanted to watch!”
- anonymous, from the survey

“I really enjoyed the webinar. It was the most interesting experience of a lifetime that I was longing to have.”
- Sir Kisiangani
How engaging was the webinar?

Very engaging: 75%
Somewhat engaging: 24%
Not engaging: 1%
WHAT’S NEXT?

Expansion of Global Swimways Movement together with IUCN

Continued connection and storytelling around the world

World Fish Migration Day 2020!