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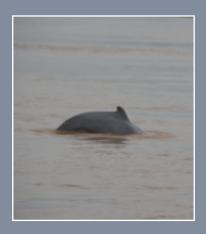


## **IRRIWADDY DOLPHINS**

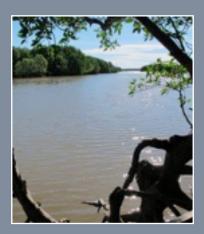
The scientific name for this species is Orcaella brevirostris. The name brevirostris comes from the Latin meaning short-beaked. Overall, the dolphins' colour is

grey to dark slate blue. The dorsal fin is small and rounded behind the middle of the back. The forehead is high and rounded and the beak is lacking. They have broad and rounded flippers. It is not a true river dolphin, but an oceanic dolphin that lives in brackish water near coasts, river mouths and in estuaries. It has established subpopulations in the Mekong. The five subpopulations vary in size from 10s-100 and are vulnerable.

# ECOTOURISM (2)







# FOR WHO IS ECOTOURISM

Basically everyone can be an ecotourist. It appeals to a wide range of travelers, of ages and interests. Travelers who choose ecotourism are responsible consumers interested in sustainability & authentic local experiences. They have the opportunity to give back something to the communities they visit.

This news letter is the last part of a two serie edition about ecotourism. Whereas the the first edition focussed on the question "what is ecotourism?" - this edition will give you an example of a project I visited in Cambodia: The Irriwaddy Dolphin conservation project.

#### The Irriwaddy Dolphin Project

This dolphin species, *Orcaella brevirostris*, is a vulnerable species, but the subpopulations in the Mekong River are critically endangered with 5 populations still declining. It is is possible to see this species in their natural habitat: the Mekong River.

The government has set up an ecotourism programme which is called The Mekong Discovery Trail. Tourists can take the tour boats to the dolphin population. All tourists, boats and boatmen are subjected to the guidelines (see dolphin viewing scorecard) and prohibits getting too close to the dolphins. Also important, your guide can tell you more about the threats and latest situation of the dolphins. The local boatmen were former fishermen in that area and can now earn their living by guiding tourists in the same waters. The rest of the money goes to the government to fund environmental education and maintenance of The Mekong Discovery Trail.

#### The threats

This species lives in estuarine and freshwater occurrence where also many threats from human activities occur. Threats include mortality from getting entangled in gillnets, vessel strikes, and habitat loss and degradation. Especially sand dredging near Koh Kong causes soil degradation of the river floor. Also it alters the river's ecosystem. Most of its habitat is destroyed by deforestation, mining and dams.

Live captures for aquarium display also have been a conservation issue in some local areas. They have been hunted directly in the past in the Mekong River, but are revered by local people in many areas of Asia.

#### **IUCN** red list

The <u>IUCN red list</u> shows all threatened species. The scientific work groups conduct research on the Irriwaddy Dolphin to get more understanding of this species. You can <u>help</u> IUCN.

## Have you thought about...

- considering ecotourism destinations such as The Mekong Discovery Trail?
- removing the filter of your extinguished cigaret before discarding it in nature?
- using a water filter to save plastic bottles?

