



WWF

BRIEFING

INT

2019

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IRRAWADDY RIVER DOLPHINS

SCIENTIFIC NAME: ORCAELLA BREVIROSTRIS

POPULATION Less than 300 freshwater Irrawaddy dolphins still live in the wild, making these riverine subpopulations critically endangered.

MORE ABOUT THEM

The Irrawaddy dolphin is found in three rivers in South and Southeast Asia: the Irrawaddy (Myanmar), the Mahakam (Kalimantan, Indonesia) and the Mekong (Cambodia). Featuring a bulging forehead and short beak, this elegant animal will pop its head out of the water to breathe, followed by its back; the tail is rarely seen. Its scientific name is *Orcaella brevirostris*.

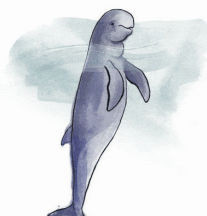
It feeds on bony fish and fish eggs and squirt streams of water that can reach up to 1.5 meters to herd fish into their hunting area.

WHY IS THE IRRAWADDY RIVER DOLPHIN THREATENED?

Large numbers of this species are killed by entanglement in gill nets and illegal fishing activities including electrofishing. The species is not directly exploited but can accidentally end up in fishing gear. Habitat degradation and population fragmentation due to dam development has severely impacted the species along with pollution of pesticides from palm oil plantations and mining (Indonesia), mercury poisoning from gold mining hydraulic blasting and dredging (Myanmar).

WHAT IS WWF DOING?

In addition to conducting research to learn about dolphin mortality, population and ecology, WWF teaches local communities about river dolphins and environmental conservation. We have developed community fishery management zones to help sustainably manage fish and prevent dolphins from accidental capture in nets and other equipment. River guards help track the dolphins and enforce sustainable fishing practices to help the population.



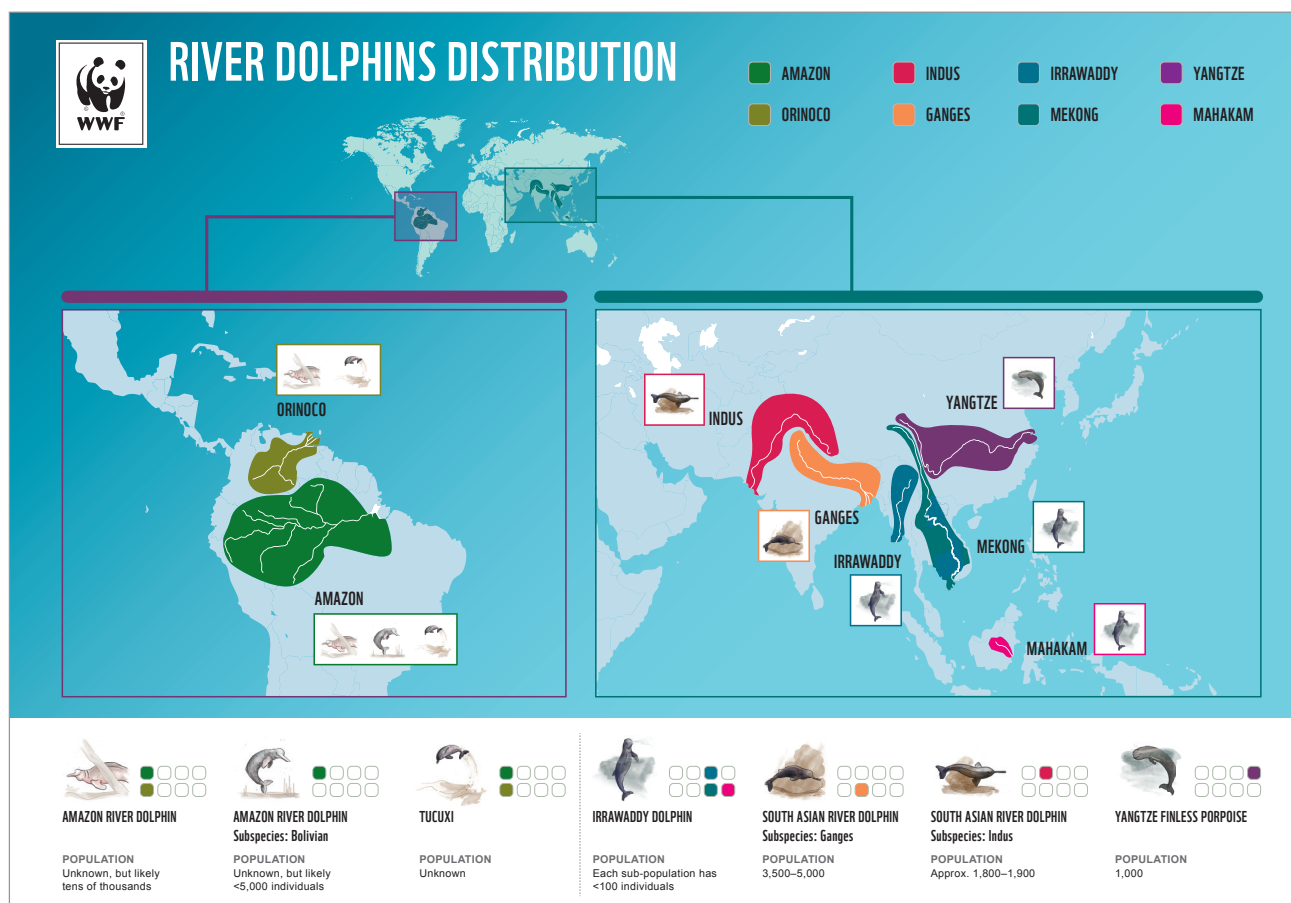
HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Only by building and growing a strong global community of partners will we be able to secure the long-term future of river dolphins.

WWF is excited to work with local and global partners on key projects including:

- Promoting sustainable energy as an alternate to building more hydropower in the core habitats of the species
- working with local partners and communities to establish sustainable fishing practices;
- improving protect area management and increasing the network of habitats under conservation and protection.
- raising awareness and running educational activities;
- establishing baseline population numbers and range data (where data are not complete);
- working with key local (and inter)national industries to transform their business practices and adopt water stewardship practices;
- creating a global movement to unite and inspire governments, businesses and communities to secure the long-term future of river dolphins, their rivers and the communities that depend on them.
- working towards a signed Inter-Governmental Declaration by 2021 to protect river dolphins worldwide.

JOIN US. TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE THIS HAPPEN.



RIVER DOLPHINS AT RISK

River dolphins are found in 15 countries, covering some of the world's most ecologically diverse river basins, including the Yangtze, Mekong, Indus, and Ganges in Asia and the Orinoco and Amazon basins in South America.

There are however only **five existing species** of river dolphins left in the world today and **they are all endangered or critically endangered**.

WWF's answer to disrupt and reverse this trend is to build a global movement, the River Dolphin Initiative, to secure the long-term future of river dolphins, their rivers and the communities that depend on them.

Our vision is that by 2030, we will have stopped the decline of river dolphin populations in Asia and South America and will have restored and doubled the most threatened populations.

There are three major global threats to river dolphins:

- Unsustainable fishing and fishing-related activities. In Asia, (illegal) bycatch is the number one cause of river dolphin mortality. In South America, intentional killing of river dolphins for fish bait and meat affects several thousand dolphins per year.
- Infrastructure projects that affect habitat connectivity, including hydropower dams, irrigation barrages and

embankments. In Asia, river dolphin habitat has decreased by 50–70% and in South America by 10%. Asia and South America are in the grips of an infrastructure explosion; for example, with hundreds of dams planned in the Amazon, and a potential giant dam in the lower Mekong (Sambor).

- Mining, agriculture and industrial development that degrade water quality. Deteriorating water quality due to agriculture runoff and industrial effluents is a serious threat to dolphins in Asia, while mercury poisoning due to gold mining has been found in dolphins in both Asia and South America.

HOW WILL WE DELIVER THIS INITIATIVE?

WWF has long-term river dolphin conservation experience, but we know that we cannot bend the curve alone. Our solution is to mobilize a powerful global community of partners to secure the future of river dolphins and the communities that depend on healthy and productive freshwater ecosystems.



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