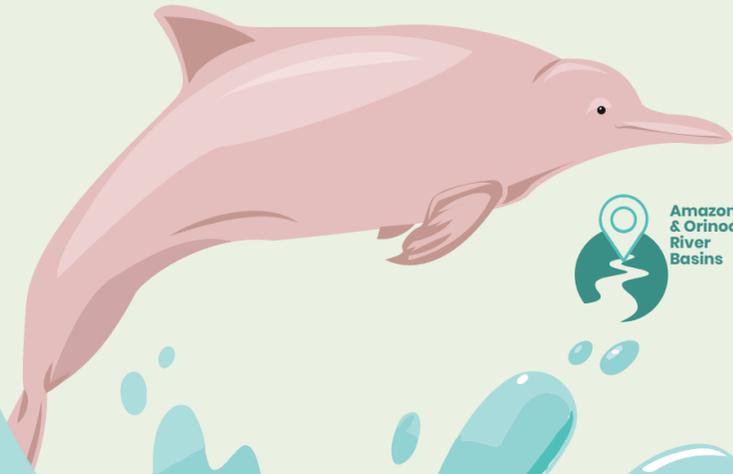


River Dolphins

CONSERVATION STATUS:

ENDANGERED



Amazon & Orinoco River Basins

Amazon river dolphin

Inia geoffrensis

It migrates 3-10 km a day, and unlike any other dolphin, it has a flexible neck which allows it to move its head left and right. This helps it chase fish in the flooded Amazon forest.



Freshwater dolphins are **indicator species**

meaning that when a freshwater dolphin population is thriving, the state of that freshwater basin is also likely flourishing.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED



Mekong, Irrawaddy, Mahakam Rivers

Irrawaddy river dolphin

Orcaella brevirostris

The Irrawaddy dolphin is named after the River Ayeyawady in Myanmar. It can spit water up to 5 ft away in order to herd fish while hunting.



Dolphins emit ultrasonic sounds

known as echolocation which aids both navigation and communication. This ability benefits all river dolphin species, but especially the Indus and Ganges river dolphins which are essentially blind due to living in muddy waters for generations.

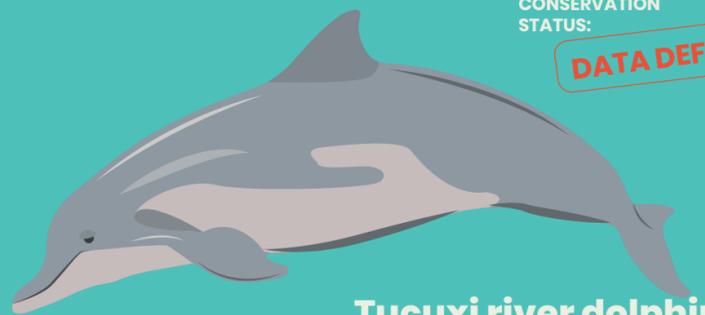
To prevent drowning while sleeping,

only half of the dolphin's brain goes to sleep.



The other half remains awake, so that they can continue to surface to breathe.

Activities such as **dam building, unsustainable fishing, and pollution** have all contributed to the **drastic decline in freshwater dolphin populations.**



CONSERVATION STATUS:

DATA DEFICIENT

Tucuxi river dolphin

Sotalia fluviatilis

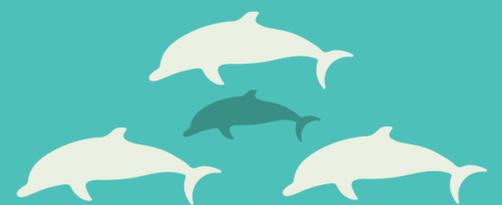
It is the only river dolphin that jumps like marine dolphins. Being relatively small, their gestation period is also relatively short - around 10 months.



Amazon & Orinoco River Basins

Can range in length of

5.9 feet
to
9.2 feet



Dolphins

keep their young in the center of the pod to protect them.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

ENDANGERED



Ganges, Brahmaputra, Indus Rivers

South Asian river dolphin

Platanista gangetica gangetica
Platanista gangetica minor

Its range has declined by 80%. The species is locally known as "susu" and "bhulan," referring to the noise the dolphin makes when it breathes.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED



Yangtze River

Yangtze finless porpoise

Neophocaena asiaorientalis

The Yangtze finless porpoise is known for its mischievous smile, and its intelligence level is on par with a gorilla. They are the only freshwater porpoise in the world!

Along with crocodiles, sharks, and sea turtles, dolphins are some of the oldest creatures on Earth. Some scientists believe the first dolphin existed about 50 million years ago. Just five river dolphin species survive worldwide: the Yangtze finless porpoise, Amazon river dolphin, Tucuxi, South Asian river dolphin and Irrawaddy river dolphin. River dolphin migration patterns and those of migratory fish are closely interlinked. River dolphins, while mammals, also migrate because their food source does. River dolphins can often be seen at the confluences of two rivers, partly because that is where migratory fish tend to gather to swim up smaller, fast flowing streams together. The fish help each other move upstream against the current much like birds do flying in a V-formation. Dolphins follow migratory fish upstream when the fish return to their spawning areas. Therefore, they are negatively impacted by the same problems that migratory fish face.

Large numbers of river dolphins are killed by entanglement in gill nets and illegal fishing activities like electrofishing. Dam development has severely impacted the species through habitat degradation, population fragmentation and migration disruption. They also suffer from water quality issues such as pesticides, mining, and mercury poisoning from gold mining. The effects of climate change, especially droughts and floods further exacerbate these threats.

Different species of freshwater dolphin are at varying risk of extinction: Amazon River dolphins and South Asian river dolphins are endangered; Yangtze finless porpoises and Irrawaddy dolphins are critically endangered; Tucuxi are data deficient (not enough information to determine their conservation status); and the Baiji of the Yangtze was declared functionally extinct in 2006.

River dolphins are an indicator of the health of their rivers; the mighty rivers Ganges, Indus, Mekong, Yangtze, Irrawaddy, Mahakam, Orinoco and Amazon, that hundreds of millions of people depend on. When a freshwater dolphin population is thriving, the state of that freshwater basin is likely also flourishing. However, if not many dolphins are present, it is considered a red flag that the health of the entire surrounding environment is declining. Dolphins are top predators and play important roles in their food webs by

helping to balance their river ecosystem. Hunting for food helps keep populations of other species stable, which maintains water and food availability. This is important to the well-being and health of humans, as well as the vast number of animals who live in these freshwater areas.

Dolphins are humans' closest aquatic relatives - both species are warm-blooded, breathe air, and nurse their young. To prevent drowning while sleeping, only half of the dolphin's brain goes to sleep. The other half remains awake, so they can continue to surface to breathe. Irrawaddy river dolphins spit water up to 5 feet (1.5 m) in order to herd fish while hunting. The South Asian river dolphin (Ganges and Indus) is functionally blind, but can manoeuvre perfectly relying on echolocation. The Amazon River dolphin migrates 3 to 10 km per day, and has a flexible neck enabling them to turn their heads 180 degrees to easily navigate between underwater branches and roots. Most river dolphins do not jump, except for the South American Tucuxi that jumps out of the water exactly like its marine cousins. The Yangtze finless porpoise is the only freshwater porpoise in the world.



[WWF River Dolphin River Initiative](#)