
Report of the Cetacean Specialist Group

William F. Perrin

This will be a short report. Simon Stuart noted we issued an Action Plan last year, covering the 5-year period 1988-1992. I have a copy here. I also have here a copy of the proceeding volume for a workshop that we organized in China in 1986. This came out in June and is available from IUCN Publication Services.

Our Action Plan concentrates on the small cetaceans, because we believe that the greatest problems are there. Some of the small cetaceans are in imminent danger of extinction, in particular some of the river dolphins.

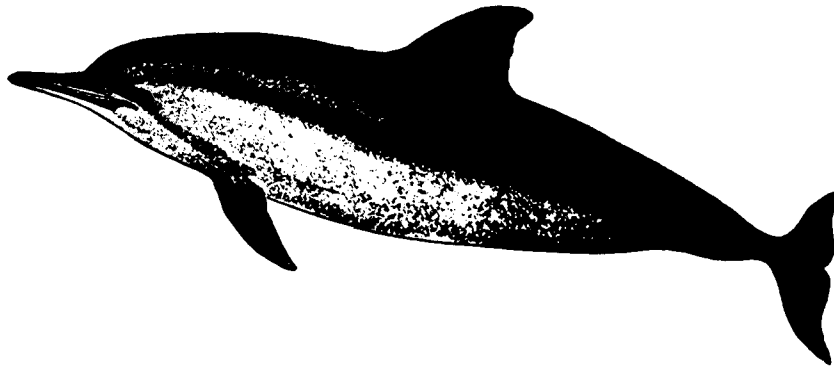
The plan lists 44 specific projects and actions that the Group believes should go forward. We consider 11 to be of the highest priority. Most of these (8) are concerned with river dolphins: the remaining three relate to the incidental kill of vaquitas in the Gulf of California, the illegal use of small cetaceans for crab bait in southern South America, and the need for a workshop on gillnets and cetaceans.

We cannot say that our progress in implementing the plan has been tremendous, but we can report some achievements for several of the recommended actions, and I'll summarize these very briefly.

Project 15. We recommended that the status of the common dolphin in the western Mediterranean be assessed because of a possible great decline in the population there. This was to include research on the stock identity of dolphins in the western Mediterranean and the adjacent North Atlantic. Alex Aguilar of the University of Barcelona has received a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) U.S.-Spain Program to begin the work, using tagging and sighting surveys, and the first report will be due in October.

Project 35. One of the high-priority items for the severely endangered baiji, or Chinese river dolphin, is to determine individual movements and population structure. Bernd Wuerzig of Texas A & M University has begun this work with funding from WWF, under a joint research agreement with the Academia Sinica and Nanjing Normal University. In addition, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) funded two Chinese students to attend the recent IWC-sponsored workshop on photo-identification methods for cetacean assessment, and they have returned to China and made a good start on cataloguing the individual dolphins in the baiji population (about 300).

Project 36. Also, Professor Zhou Kaija of Nanjing Normal University has just informed me that he has received funding from WWF for



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continuing monitoring trends in abundance, for photo-identification, and for grass-roots work in education.

Project 39. We are happy to report that good progress has been made toward saving Hector's dolphin, which is endemic to New Zealand. The New Zealand government has established a sanctuary to protect the species from gillnetting and has started programs to monitor trends in abundance and to obtain better information on kill rates. This has been primarily due to the efforts of Steve Dawson and Elizabeth Slooten of Canterbury University in Christchurch, but the international expressions of concern seem to have helped.

Project 40. Many of the problems that cetaceans face are caused by fisheries, and some of the worst problems are caused by gillnets. We recommended that an international workshop be convened to examine the problem of gillnets and cetaceans. We are very happy to announce that the meeting will take place in September, next year, in La Jolla, California. It will be organized by the Scientific Committee of the IWC and hosted by the Southwest Fisheries Center of the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service. We now have about 1/2 of the \$40,000 that we need for the meeting. The funds have come from WWF-Sweden, the Southwest Fisheries Center, and the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission. Other organizations have indicated interest, including national agencies and UNEP, and we have high hopes. The charges to the workshop will be to identify new and expanding fisheries that kill cetaceans, to design programs to collect adequate statistics on the kills, and to discuss possible ways to reduce the kills through technological research and innovative management. It will be especially important to involve par-

ticipants from the developing nations that are placing high priority on coastal and offshore fishery development. The amount of money we are able to raise will determine how many of these people we can include. So we do have significant progress on 5 projects.

The 44 projects listed in the action plan will cost in total about \$1 million. So far, we've succeeded in raising only a small fraction of that. Ninety percent of the projects remain to be initiated. Many of these relate to situations where species or populations most definitely will disappear in this century unless there is intervention. The most severe crises are in the Indian sub-continent and in China. The most recent news is that the susu has disappeared from the Karnaphuli River above the Kaptai Dam in Bangladesh, apparently because of poaching. This is a very large piece of habitat, now empty of dolphins. In another piece of grim news, it is estimated that construction of the proposed Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River will destroy dolphin habitat along 200 km of the river below the dam and reduce the carrying capacity of another 150 km of the river by 41-71%.

We need to move on these projects, and the Cetacean Specialist Group would very much welcome any assistance or advice on how to proceed.

William F. Perrin
Chairman, Cetacean Specialist Group