

Dolphins under Threat

Conservation of Humpback Dolphins

One of only two endemic dolphin species from western Africa, the Atlantic humpback dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*), is one of two or, more likely, three coastal species of humpback dolphins in the genus *Sousa*. It is a mid-sized species distributed in tropical and subtropical waters from the Western Sahara south to southern Angola. Its habitat is predominantly nearshore and estuarine, but it does not appear to live in fresh water. The species was discovered in Cameroon in 1892, never to be found there again since. Nowadays, 10 range states are known in West Africa.

While historically the Atlantic humpback dolphin may have been distributed nearly continuously along West African coasts, gaps are now apparent. Monitoring of dolphin captures in artisanal fisheries off Ghana showed the presence of some 15 species of small cetaceans, but not a single humpback dolphin.

Despite exploratory boat trips, the species was also not encountered off Benin. Either it never occurred in this part of the Gulf of Guinea or, more likely, it has become locally extinct or very rare, due to human pressure.

A recent review provisionally named eight hypothetical 'stocks' for conservation and management purposes. While some may coincide with a biological population if indications of reproductive isolation are confirmed, other stocks may be artefacts, resulting from poor sampling. Atlantic humpback dolphins do not seem to migrate or otherwise move seasonally. However, some stocks straddle two or more nations and regular, perhaps daily, border crossings may occur. Technically speaking this qualifies the dolphin as a 'migratory species' under the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species.

Information on natural history and ecology is scarce. Some stocks are clearly small, although no actual abundance estimates are available. The northernmost (Dahkla Bay) stock, it is guessed, may number less than one hundred while the Guinea-Bissau population, possibly one of the healthiest, could number in the high hundreds.

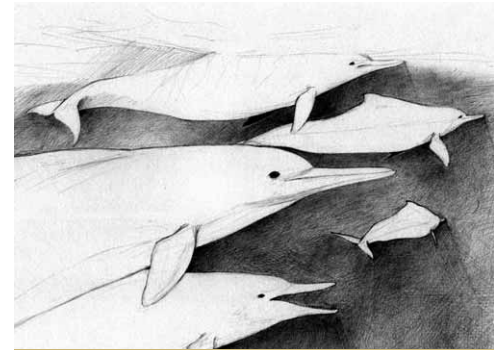
Surely many more Atlantic humpback dolphins die entangled in gillnets than the few recorded captures so far suggest. If unmitigated, this mortality, along with rapid coastal habitat degradation, may threaten the long-term survival of this enigmatic African mammal. Increased research and conservation efforts are needed to address these concerns, while actively involving local scientists and managers.

The Indo-Pacific species, *Sousa chinensis* and *S. plumbea*, are not in such a precarious position.

Between them, they occupy a vast range (from South Africa east to central China and northern Australia), and collectively may number several tens of thousands of individuals. A single population in Hong Kong and the Pearl River Estuary numbers well over 1,400. Despite this, these animals are still threatened to some extent. They occur in coastal waters, in some of the most degraded and heavily populated parts of the earth. They appear to be particularly vulnerable to problems of habitat loss and degradation, and we suspect they are being negatively affected by myriad forms of environmental pollution.

A special issue of the journal *Aquatic Mammals* highlights the status and conservation of humpback dolphins throughout their range. The volume is comprised of 16 papers, and includes status reports on regions of major study. Copies of the special issue are available in paper or CD-Rom format from the editor, Jeanette Thomas, at J-Thomas@wiu.edu.

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Atlantic humpback dolphin

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Global Tree and Sustainable Use – A Cooperative Approach

In keeping with IUCN's attempts to adopt a more integrated approach across its programmes, the Global Tree Specialist Group (GTSG) and the Sustainable Use Specialist Group (SUSG) have formed a new partnership.

With both Chairs Sara Oldfield (Global Tree), and Jon Hutton (Sustainable Use) based at Fauna and Flora International in Cambridge, UK, this is a convenient partnership. Perhaps more important than the geographical similarity, is the substantial overlap between the interests and activities of the Groups, and each stands to benefit significantly from interaction with the other.

The GTSG has over 70 expert members, from botanic gardens, herbaria, universities and both governmental and non-governmental organisations, who contribute to the main aims of the Group. These include promotion and implementation of global Red Listing for trees and acting in an advisory capacity to the Fauna and Flora International/UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre Global Trees Campaign. The campaign focuses on trees as flagship species for conserva-

