



Dear Dolphin Friend,

We are using the year as an opportunity to present one species of dolphin each month in more detail. The dolphin of the month for March is the Commerson Dolphin, which is considered to be one of the most beautiful dolphin species.

Stubby as they are, Commerson dolphins resemble harbour porpoises rather than dolphins. They also rank among the smallest representatives of the family of dolphins (up to 1.50 meters). However compared to harbour porpoises which are usually very shy, Commerson Dolphins are lively and curious fellows, who often swim up close to boats.



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But their curiosity and their preference for shallow waters turned out to be fatal again and again. Incidental capture in gillnets caused the death of 90 Commerson Dolphins in a single year. Considering this death toll, we not only lament the lost lives of each individual, but we also are concerned about the survival of the small populations.

Thanks to the efforts of our partner WDCS, the Commerson Dolphin was honoured as a "national monument" of the province Santa Cruz in Argentina several years ago. In addition, the fishery authority banned the use of gillnets near La Angelina, Santa Cruz. Stopping the use of dolphin meat as baits in fisheries was another success. Since the animals are so curious and come close to boats, it is very easy to catch them. For many years Commerson Dolphins were hunted in the Pacific waters of South America, in order to use them as bait for crabs.

Even 20 years after the first project to protect Commerson Dolphins was initiated in Santa Cruz, there is cause for concern: Besides increasing environmental pollution and bycatch in gillnets, there is more shipping traffic, which adds to noise pollution in the sea. As a result researchers have already identified in some animals a change in their natural behaviour patterns.

Commerson Dolphins are listed in the IUCN red list of the World Conservation Union as "Data Deficient": There is not enough information available to determine the conservation status of these animals. This does not mean that the species has not been studied, but it merely refers to the fact that little or no information is available on population size and distribution of the animals.

In addition, the South American population is listed in Appendix II of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). Appendix II includes animal species, which are not threatened with extinction, but could become extinct soon without internationally co-ordinated conservation measures.

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