

## DOLPHINS BACK IN SINGAPORE ...

By Catherine Brassaud

LET'S talk about dolphins for a while. Are they not one of your favourite encounters while diving underwater or sailing? Are you not delighted when you see them surfing the bow or following you in the blue darkness of the seas? Am I wrong? No? So, if you enjoy watching them, take five minutes to fill up our sighting form and help us to increase our dolphin sighting database.

The Singapore Wild Marine Mammal Survey (SWiMMS) was started in May 1996 with the aim to monitor the local dolphin and dugong populations. For that purpose, reports from people oriented toward the marine environment are of great importance. They give us a better understanding of our dolphins' whereabouts.

Since October 1998, SWiMMS has started its second phase with a new sighting form that is available here at the Raffles Marina Dockmaster's Office and in most of the dive shops and dive clubs, and even from the website: <http://dsg.sbs.nus.edu.sg>.

Filling up one of these forms won't take you too long because only a few details are asked for such as the date, the time, the location, dolphin basic behaviours, etc. The hardest part of the job is to know what species you are looking at. Unfortunately, there are dozens of dolphin species but hopefully, in Singapore waters, you may just encounter four different species plus the dugong.

It is not that complicated. If you enjoy seeing dolphins happily splashing in the water, then you surely wouldn't mind giving me a hand with that sighting form. And keep in mind that that you can at least write a brief description of the "strange monster" you observed instead of the species!

To make your work easier, the four more commonly sighted species are:

- the Bottlenose Dolphin
- the Humpback Dolphin
- the Irrawaddy Dolphin
- the Finless Porpoise

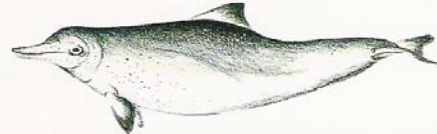
Then, of course, there is the dugong.

DOLPHINS ARE BACK!

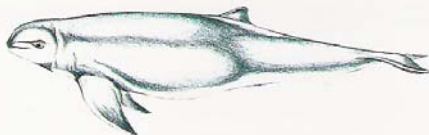
No words can describe the different dolphins as well as a picture! But these few basic points should help you identify them such as the colour, the snout and the dorsal fin.



• **Bottlenose Dolphins** are dark grey with a beak and a dorsal fin



• **Humpback Dolphins** are snow white to pink individuals; have both a beak and a dorsal fin



• **Irrawaddy Dolphins** are dark grey without a beak but with a small dorsal fin



• **Finless Porpoises** are dark grey without both the beak and the dorsal fin

<http://dsg.sbs.nus.edu.sg>

Now that I've got your interest with this easy way to identify our main dolphin species, let me add a few words. It could be a little more difficult in the wild, in the middle of a grey swelling sea with those elusive animals but I'm sure that nothing will stop you motivated dolphin watchers!

### editor's note:

Catherine Brassaud is a French biologist with the Dolphin Study Group (DSG) of the Tropical Marine Science Institute (TMSI) at the National University of Singapore. Her job is to monitor dolphin and dugong populations in Singapore waters as part of the DSG's research project called SWiMMS (Singapore Wild Marine Mammal Survey).