



The Irrawaddy Dolphin does not have a beak but a wide smile instead. It has a small dorsal fin.

Catherine Brassaud tells how we can all play a contributory part in ensuring the continued existence of these highly intelligent mammals.

Watching Dolphins for Pleasure and Study

Photos by Catherine Brassaud and Dr Thomas Jefferson



The Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin has a characteristic hump at the dorsal fin.

The Singapore Wild Marine Mammal Survey (SWIMMS) is a project by The Dolphin Study Group, part of the Tropical Marine Science Institute (TMSI) based at the National University of Singapore. This project started in May 1996 and is focussed on studying the general distribution of dolphins and dugongs in Singapore and regional waters.

For that purpose, a sighting form was distributed to the public interested in the marine environment. This form enabled people to report all information related to their observations of marine mammals such as the date, time, location, species, numbers and basic behavior. More than 100 sighting forms have been received, and more continue to come in.

Our website showcases these numerous observations of dolphins around Singapore. Take some time to look at the results and check out the different dolphin species. Apart from printing a copy of the sighting form from the website, it is also available from many dive shops and dive clubs in Singapore.

You can contribute significantly to the project by providing us with real-time reports of marine mammals in Singapore waters. This means that if possible, you should contact us



Finless Porpoise mother and calf.

within an hour or two after observing the animals, noting down the number of individuals, the time, and most importantly, the location of the sighting. A GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) reading of the location would be even better, but otherwise, we can usually cope with a brief description of the place where the marine mammals had been spotted. The species identification is not absolutely necessary. The real-time reporting on the location of the sighting remains the most valuable information as it enables us to go straight out to the area where the animals were seen.

Another very interesting way to study marine mammals is to collect data from dead animals that have been washed ashore. Marine mammals die at sea and their bodies are usually brought ashore by currents. Carcasses are a priceless source of information as they provide us with plenty of details about the animal's life history (size, colour patterns, reproductive features, etc) and its health (diseases, parasites, etc). Should you come

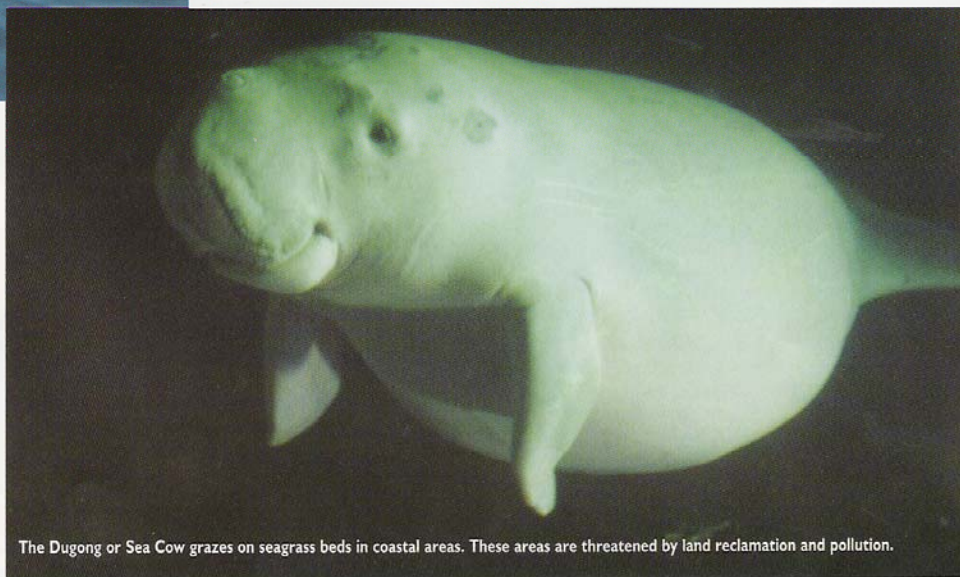
across a dead or stranded marine mammal somewhere in Singapore, give us a call straightaway.

We will come to the location as soon as possible as a fresh carcass provides scientists with more data than a mummified one! It might even be a live animal lying on its belly! This poor creature would be suffering and needing assistance. Don't attempt any rescue by yourself as only experienced people can attend to an injured marine mammal. The best thing to do is still to contact us.

Another way to take part in SWIMMS is to become a volunteer in our marine mammal surveys. Seagrass and dugong surveys will give volunteers the opportunity to get involved in our research projects. As dugongs feed on seagrass, it is very interesting to learn more about the distribution of seagrass in Singapore waters. For this purpose, surveys will be carried out this year to investigate the distribution of seagrass. A search for seagrass patches will be done at very low tide around several islands off northern Singapore. This search will require much walking and some snorkeling. Ground-based surveys to collect data on dugongs have also been scheduled for one Sunday morning per month on the offshore island of Pulau Ubin. These are based on the valuable information gathered from previous seagrass surveys. We are still looking for volunteers.

As members of the SWIMMS team, volunteers will acquire some skills in marine biology and survey methods. This is a little bit of work but the rewards are tremendous — how many lucky people get to experience encounters with marine mammals? 🌸

Send your sighting records to SWIMMS Dolphin Study Group, Tropical Marine Science Institute, National University of Singapore, 14 Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119223. Tel: 774 9913. Fax: 774 9654. Access the website at <http://dsg.sbs.nus.edu.sg>



The Dugong or Sea Cow grazes on seagrass beds in coastal areas. These areas are threatened by land reclamation and pollution.