Dolphin Diploma: fact-sheet 1
The Irrawaddy dolphin

What do Irrawaddy dolphins look like?
Irrawaddies are unusual looking dolphins and so they are easy to recognise. They have round heads with no beaks and flexible necks. They also have large paddle-shaped flippers and small, triangular shaped dorsal fins (the fin on their backs). Irrawaddy dolphins are grey in colour, and grow to be around 2.1m long.

Where do they live?
Most Irrawaddy dolphins (90%) live in Bangladesh where fresh river waters flow into the salty Bay of Bengal. Smaller numbers of Irrawaddies are found elsewhere in south East Asia (including Laos, Thailand, Myanmar & Philippines) and there are also some tiny populations (less than 100) of Irrawaddies that live in totally fresh water rivers; sadly these are all threatened with extinction.

What do they eat?
Fish, squid and crustaceans such as crabs.

How do they behave?
Irrawaddy dolphins swim slowly, and they can be hard to see because they rarely leap about or spy hop (pop their heads out to look around). They are usually seen in small groups of less than 6, but have been spotted travelling in bigger groups of around 15. Irrawaddy dolphins usually steer clear of humans. However, in Myanmar they famously cooperate with traditional fishermen. The dolphins herd fish into the fishermen’s nets and in return are rewarded with a few of the fish!

Why are they endangered?
Irrawaddy dolphins live close to people and so this brings them into more conflict than dolphins living further out to sea. Drowning in nylon fishing nets is the biggest threat of all, but people also damage Irrawaddy dolphin habitats by building dams, mining and deforestation. Some Irrawaddies are deliberately caught to be put into dolphin aquariums, and others are hunted for meat in some areas.

What can I do?
You can help raise awareness about these extraordinary dolphins. Why not create a poster to let people know about Irrawaddies and the threats they face. Or simply pointing someone in the right direction and telling them about WDC could help save endangered dolphins from extinction.
Dolphin Diploma: fact-sheet 2
The Ganges River dolphin

What does a Ganges River dolphin look like?

Ganges river dolphins have long, slender beaks, which is typical of river dolphins. They have lots of teeth, which you can see even when they close their mouths. They have tiny eyes and are almost completely blind. They rely on echolocation to find their way around and catch food. Their flippers are large and wide. Their grey-brownish bodies are small (2 – 2.5 m long) and stocky. The fins on their back (dorsal fins) are tiny.

Where do they live?

They only live in parts of Asia - in freshwater rivers of Nepal, India and Bangladesh. Never in the sea!

How do they behave?

They are not acrobatic dolphins, and when they breathe only a little bit of their heads come above the surface. This makes them very hard to see – especially as the rivers tend to be murky. Ganges river dolphins are unusual as they swim on their sides so that they can use a flipper to feel and search for food in the sediment on the river bed. In India they are known as ‘susus’ because of the noise they make when they surface to breathe.

Why are they endangered?

Ganges River dolphins are endangered and in real danger of going extinct. The main problem is that they live very close to large human populations. Local people use the river for everything, and their activities can harm river dolphins and damage their habitats. People use the river to fish, water their crops, supply water to their homes and factories, and to get rid of waste and pollution from the land. The biggest problem for river dolphins is fishing nets. The dolphins become entangled and then can’t get to the surface to breathe. Another serious threat is the building of dams because they change the natural flow of rivers and damage habitats. Dolphins (and many types of fish too) are not able to swim past the dams.

How can I help?

All the problems facing Ganges river dolphins are due to human causes. Therefore we can all help, and the first step is spreading the word. To raise awareness of the threats to these river dolphins’ existence would help significantly in the fight to save them.
Dolphin Diploma: fact-sheet 3
The common dolphin – no longer common

Common dolphins are amazing acrobats …

Common dolphins are often found in large active groups. They are very energetic and acrobatic, and can seem to spend as much time above the water as they do under it.

They can be seen and heard from long distances, as they jump and splash around. Their loud, high-pitched squeaks can often be heard above the surface of the water.

They usually dive for short periods of 10 seconds to 2 minutes, although dives of 8 minutes have been recorded.

What does a common dolphin look like?

Common dolphins can be easily recognised by the hourglass/criss-cross pattern of yellow, white, grey and black on their sides. They have a dark V-shaped cape under the dorsal fin, dark fins and fluke and yellow/white patches on their sides and belly.

There are both long-beaked and short-beaked common dolphins. Adult common dolphins grow to between 1.7 and 2.4 meters in length.

Common dolphins are spread out across the world

Common Dolphins are found in many places with lots of different populations in all oceans. They are known as an off-shore species so aren’t usually found near the coast, and are rarely seen in waters shallower than 180m. In some areas common dolphin populations can be seen all year around, in other areas they are only seen at certain times of the year.

Common dolphins are no longer common …

Common dolphins in the Mediterranean Sea used to be just that…common. But now, conservationists believe that the Mediterranean common dolphin is one of the most endangered dolphins in Europe and could face extinction if urgent action isn’t taken.

Their main threat is being accidentally caught in fishing nets (which is known as bycatch). Other threats include habitat loss, human disturbance and there not being enough food for them.
Dolphin Diploma: fact-sheet 4
EXTINCT - The Chinese River dolphin

Chinese river dolphins were also known as baijis and Yangtze River Dolphins. They lived in the Yangtze River of China which is the third longest river in the world. Sadly, this dolphin species is the only one to have become extinct in recent times due to human causes.

In the 1950s there were still thousands of baiji, but by the 1980s there were only a few hundred left. Then, in 2007, a team of experts headed out on a 6-week trip to search for any surviving baijis, but they didn’t find a single one. They were forced to announce to the world that they had tragically gone extinct.

Why did this river dolphin become extinct?

Without a doubt, it was human activities that killed the dolphins. The number of dolphins killed each year became higher than the number being born and so overall baiji numbers began to shrink.

Baijis were killed by:

- **FISHING METHODS** - they were accidentally caught and drowned in nets and electrocuted during electric fishing.

- **BOAT TRAFFIC** - more and more huge boats using the river to transport people and cargo led to large numbers of dolphins being hit by boat propellers.

- **POLLUTION** - Increasingly waste was dumped into the river which destroyed healthy habitats.

- **OVERFISHING** - lack of food for the dolphins because people were over-fishing.

Millions of people live and work on or near the Yangtze River, which means that the river is used by them for all sorts of things, such as fishing, travelling and trading. As China underwent a rapid economic development, even more building work began on the River including the creation of huge dams, dredging and concreting sections of river bed, and explosions used to widen the river. There were more boats and more pollution created than ever. Together these changes destroyed wildlife habitats and left the baiji with nowhere to live.

What can be done to help other species?

The baiji’s story is a very sad one. We need to learn from this tragedy and prevent other dolphins following the baiji down the road to extinction. More research needs to be done to find out which areas of rivers and oceans are most important to dolphins, these areas then need to be protected by law. We can all help by raising awareness of dolphins and the threats they face, and taking part in activities such as fundraising and writing letters to governments.