

Welcome to the Year of the Dolphin!

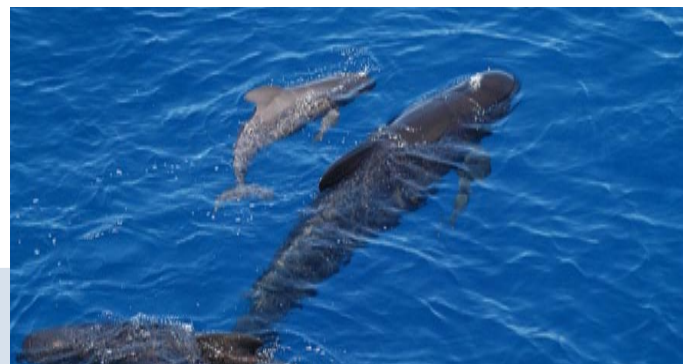
The UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), its specialized agreements on whales, dolphins and porpoises (cetaceans), the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS) together with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCCS) have declared 2007 the Year of the Dolphin.



The United Nations (UNEP and UNESCO), governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the tourist group TUI as a corporate partner, are building a strong alliance

to achieve a common objective: to protect dolphins. Crucial factors in achieving this are education to create awareness of dolphin species and the threats facing them, informing decision makers and involving local communities. The Year of the Dolphin will be part of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development. The campaign is also a

tangible contribution towards meeting the targets of significantly reducing the loss of biodiversity by 2010, which all governments have agreed at several global UN meetings.



Why are dolphins so important?

Dolphins are intrinsically tied to our cultural history. Migrating through oceans and rivers, they are a living treasure of our blue planet. However their survival is increasingly at stake.

There are at least 39 known species of dolphins, most of which are migratory. Dolphins face many threats – incidental capture in fisheries (bycatch), depletion of food resources, chemical and noise pollution, and in some cases, direct killing for meat. To survive, dolphins need clean and quiet oceans, protected areas and people who care. They are charismatic species, with highly developed modes of communication. All over the world people find dolphins appealing. They appear in ancient classical art as rescuers of shipwrecked sailors. In some areas, they help traditional fishermen to locate and net their catch. In recent years, we have seen an exponential rise in dolphin ecotourism, as more and more people are prepared to spend time and money on watching these remarkable creatures.

H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco, patron of the Year of the Dolphin

Conserving biodiversity is an important pillar within the Foundation of Nature Protection established by Prince Albert II. The Principality of Monaco, which hosts the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, has always stressed its environmental commitment, with a particular focus on the sea and marine life. The Year of the Dolphin was launched in Monaco in September 2006.

“The Year of the Dolphin gives me the opportunity to renew my firm commitment towards protecting marine biodiversity. With this strong initiative we can make a difference to save these fascinating marine mammals from the brink of extinction”, said Prince Albert, the patron of the campaign.



Threats to dolphins

The conservation status of many of the world's dolphin populations is threatened by bycatch, pollution, habitat destruction, over-fishing and climate change. Other threats include activities that may frighten, displace or otherwise harm these species such as underwater noise pollution from sources such as shipping traffic, seismic surveys and military sonars. Hundreds of thousands of dolphins die every year as a result of some of these threats.

Fisheries and bycatch: Global fisheries are increasing in intensity and range. The introduction of more sustainable fishing techniques can reduce this pressure. However, the use of destructive fishing methods and the growth of many modern commercial fisheries continue to reduce dolphin populations around the world. The impacts can be both direct through bycatch and indirect through loss of prey species.

Deliberate hunts: Some coastal communities have exploited dolphins for centuries. In some cases, dolphin bycatch has turned to deliberate setting of nets or harpoon hunts by small-scale fisheries. It is likely that the hunts are not sustainable. Despite a lack of extensive scientific research to prove this, the assumption that dolphins compete with fisheries for prey or damage fishing nets has prompted culls in some regions.

Chemical Pollution: There are many different sources of chemical pollution, including domestic sewage, industrial discharges, seepage from waste sites, atmospheric fallout, domestic and agricultural run-off, operational discharges from mines and oil rigs, accidents and spills at sea. The impacts of chemical pollution range from direct physical poisoning to degradation of important habitats. The chemicals that are probably of most concern for dolphins are the persistent organic pollutants including pesticides, such as DDT, and industrial chemicals. These substances enter marine food chains and accumulate along the chain to the top marine predators. Damage to the reproductive and immune systems of marine mammals is the likely effect of this pollution. Many dolphin populations are known to be carrying heavy contaminant burdens which may contribute to increased mortality.

Noise pollution and harassment: Hearing is the most important sense for dolphins, and the ability to hear well is vital in all key aspects of their lives including finding food, navigating and social interactions. Any reduction in hearing ability – whether by physical damage or masking by other sound – may seriously compromise the viability of individuals and, therefore, populations. Human-created noise in the marine environment contributes to an already significant natural biological and ambient level of sound. Noise pollution comes from shipping, military activities, fisheries anti-predation devices, ocean research, and the air-guns used in seismic testing to find oil and gas deposits, among others. Potential impacts of human-created noise on dolphins range from physical damage to these animals to altering behaviour, increasing stress and displacement from important habitats.

Habitat loss and degradation: Habitat loss is especially critical for dolphins with limited range, such as river dolphins. In many areas habitat loss is caused by dams, fishing structures and abstraction of water for human use. In some parts of the world water management, flood control and major river modification, including the removal of surface water, has led to population decline. Dams prevent migration and create barriers, which fragment populations.

Climate change: The implications of climate change for dolphins are compounded by the apparent rate of change (some 3 to 4 degrees celsius in higher latitudes in only 50 years), which is thought to be much faster than anything that dolphins have been exposed to in the past. The current rates of change may be too great for many dolphin species to keep up with them. Higher water temperatures are certain to have an impact on the availability of prey, which may then force dolphins to find new habitats to feed and to breed. Sea level rise and changing weather patterns with greater storminess add to habitat degradation and loss.

Founding Partners of the Year of the Dolphin

“Dolphins are among the planet’s most well-known but also increasingly vulnerable marine mammals. By highlighting their plight, we help to raise awareness about both the status of our oceans and coastal ecosystems, and the threat to species that we pose through our own actions. Among the Multilateral Environmental Agreements with which UNEP works, the Convention on Migratory Species and its Agreements stand out for their significant contribution to addressing the many threats these species face.”

Achim Steiner, UNEP, Executive Director



United Nations Environment Programme
www.unep.org



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
www.cms.int



World of TUI



Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area
www.accobams.org



Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas
www.ascobans.org



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
www.unesco.org



Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
www.wdcs.org

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How do we protect dolphins?

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals is the only UN Convention that protects dolphins along their migration routes between their feeding and breeding grounds. CMS is a unique global advocate of reducing threats to their survival as well as to the ocean and river waters where they live.



Whale and dolphin conservation is a crucial component of our work. As a response to the plight of these marine mammals the Convention decided to develop agreements to conserve whale and dolphins. The Convention and its agreements play a unique role in regional whale and dolphin conservation. The success of ACCOBAMS and ASCOBANS has proven the importance of regional protection. They set an example for conserving whales and dolphins in the rest of the world. Another agreement to conserve South Pacific Islands whales and dolphins was signed in September 2006. CMS will develop an action plan to reduce threats and protect habitats in this region. A new agreement to conserve small cetaceans in tropical West Africa is being developed.

We support research initiatives to protect whales and dolphins. This includes assessment of populations and the impact of bycatch, the training of local scientists and conducting field surveys. CMS has concluded a partnership agreement with WDCS that helps the Convention to implement projects.

What can you do to protect dolphins?

If you have a personal interest in experiencing dolphins in their natural environment, you can participate in a guided tour as one of those “once in a lifetime” experiences. In this case, please ensure that the tour operators treat whales and dolphins with care and respect. On the official Year of the Dolphin website you will find all the information about how to plan a tour. Learn more about the fascinating world of dolphins and dive with us into the virtual sea.

If you are a government representative, we would like to urge you strongly to join the campaign by promoting it on a national level, provide funds and support dolphin conservation.

We also seek support from NGOs and conservation networks to promote the Year of the Dolphin, publicise it in the media and organise relevant events. You are welcome to register your own event or support a dolphin conservation project as your organization’s contribution to the Year of the Dolphin. Donors are welcome to set up marketing strategies to publicise the campaign and provide financial support to conservation projects.

Join the campaign and visit us at

www.YOD2007.org

Imprint

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The Year of the Dolphin



Explore the world of dolphins!

www.YOD2007.org

