Neophocaena phocaenoides (Cuvier, 1829) **PHOCO Neoph 1** **PFI**

FAO Names: En - Finless porpoise; **Fr** - Marsouin aptère; **Sp** - Marsopa lisa o sin aleta.

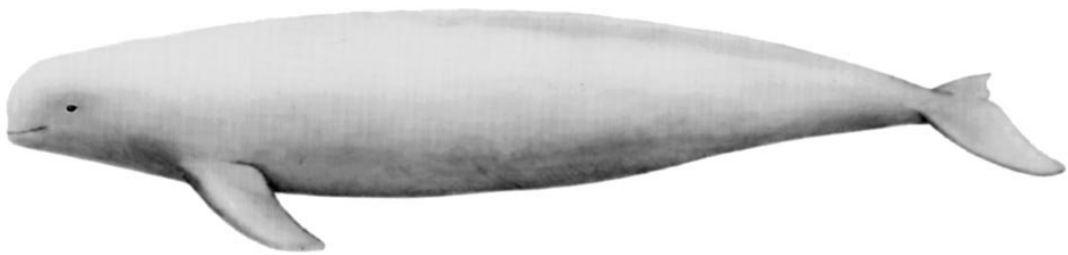
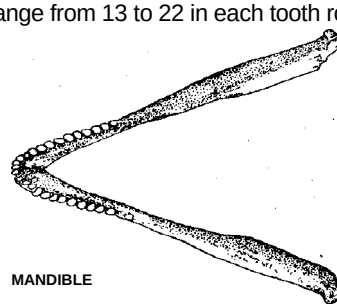


Fig. 382 ***Neophocaena phocaenoides***

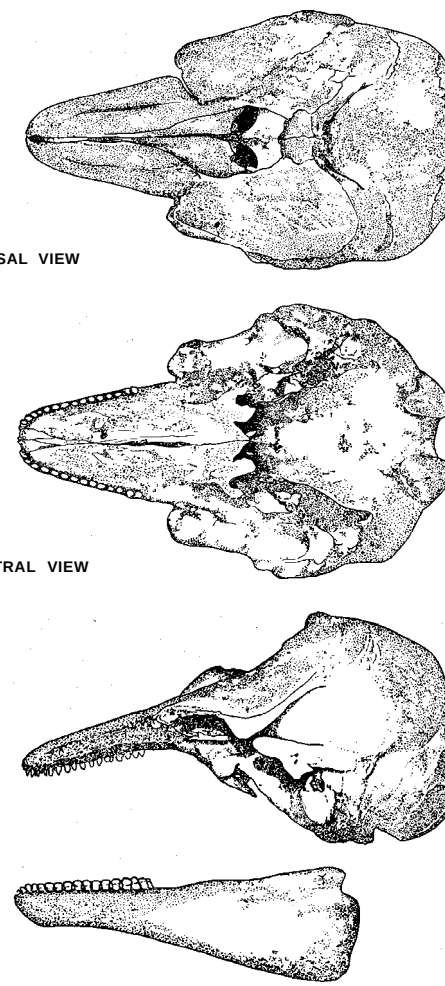
Distinctive Characteristics: As the name implies, finless porpoises have no dorsal fin, and this is their most distinctive characteristic. In some ways, they resemble small, slender white whales. The head is beakless; the rounded forehead rises steeply from the snout tip. The body shape, in general, is more slender than in other porpoises. The finless porpoise is soft and mushy, and the neck is very flexible. Instead of a dorsal fin, the finless porpoise has an area of small bumps or tubercles on its back, running from just forward of midback to the tail stock. The trailing edge of the flukes is concave and the flippers are large, ending in rounded tips. Regional differences in body size and morphology have been documented, with Yangtze River animals apparently representing a separate stock.

The common name that was used in the past, "finless black porpoise," apparently resulted from descriptions of dead animals, after post-mortem darkening. In most areas, finless porpoises are grey in colour, with lighter areas on the throat and around the genitals. Older animals are generally lighter grey than juveniles. In the Yangtze River population, they are very dark grey, nearly black.

Tooth counts range from 13 to 22 in each tooth row.



DORSAL VIEW OF MANDIBLE



DORSAL VIEW

VENTRAL VIEW

LATERAL VIEW

Fig. 383 Skull

Can be confused with: The smooth back of the finless porpoise should make it easy to distinguish from other species, such as the Irrawaddy dolphin (p. 118), baiji (p. 200), and Ganges River dolphin (p. 194), which share parts of its range.

Size: Adults of this species reach about 1.9 m in length (males are slightly larger than females). Finless porpoises are apparently about 70 to 80 cm at birth.

Geographical Distribution: Warm, coastal Indo-Pacific waters, both fresh and marine, are home to the finless porpoise. The range runs from northern Japan to the Persian Gulf, including many rivers in the Asian subcontinent (one of the best known populations is in the Yangtze River of China).

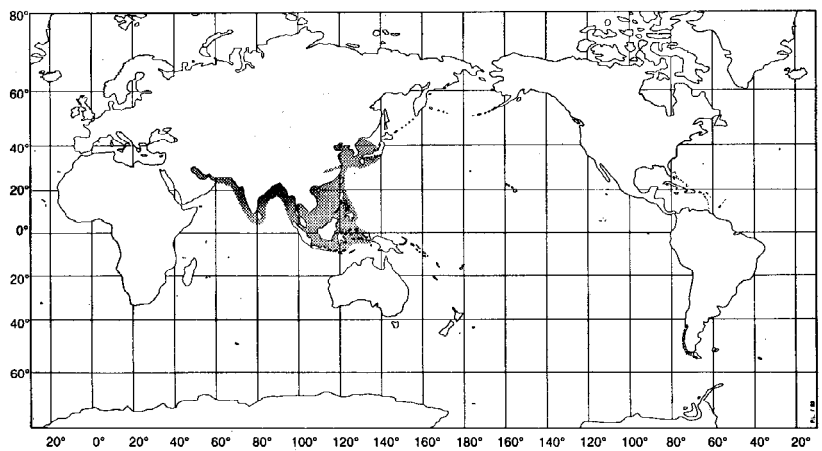


Fig. 384

Biology and Behaviour: Finless porpoises are generally found as singles, pairs, or in groups of up to 12, although aggregations of up to about 50 have been reported. Like other porpoises, their behaviour tends to be not as energetic and showy as that of dolphins. They do not ride bow waves, and in some areas appear to be shy of boats. Mothers have been seen carrying calves on the denticulated area on their backs. In the Yangtze River, finless porpoises are known to leap from the water and perform "tail stands."

Reproduction in most areas has not been well studied. Reports indicate that calving in the Yangtze River occurs between Pebruary and April, and in Japan it occurs between April and August.

Small fishes, squids, and shrimps form the diet of finless porpoises. They also apparently ingest some plant material, including leaves and rice.

Exploitation: Finless porpoises are known to be taken in various gillnet fisheries throughout their range,. including the Yangtze River. They are also incidentally taken in beach seines in India. Direct exploitation with guns, harpoons, and "fish forks" used to occur in China, and previously some incidental catches were sold for human consumption in Japan. Pollution and habitat destruction may also be factors in the status of this species. Some porpoises have been captured live for aquariums in Japan.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.

Platanista gangetica (Roxburgh, 1801)

PLAT Plat 1 **GNS**

FAO Names: En - Ganges River dolphin**; Fr -** Plataniste du Gange**; Sp -** Platanista del Ganges.

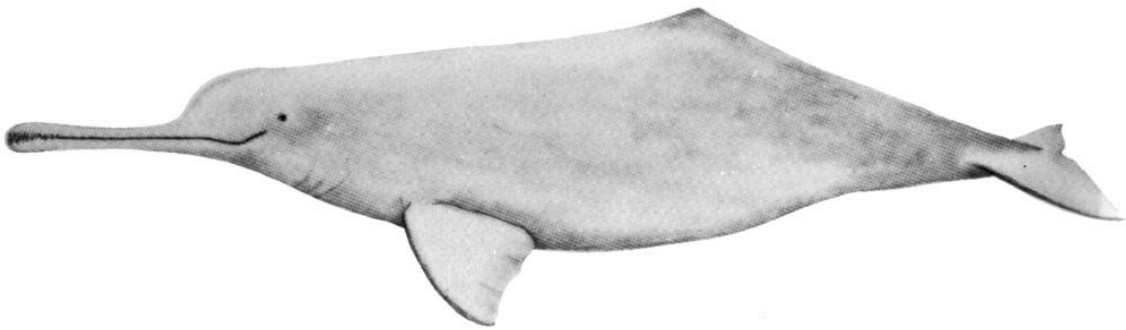


Fig. 385 ***Platanista gangetica***

Distinctive Characteristics: The Ganges River dolphin, or susu, is a very strange-looking dolphin. The body is robust and soft, with a flexible neck, often characterized by a constriction or crease. The long beak is distinct from the steep forehead, but there is no crease between them. The beak is like a pair of forceps, is laterally compressed, and widens at the tip; it is proportionately longer in females than in males. The blowhole, unlike that of most cetaceans, is a slit that runs along the long axis of the animal's body. There is a shallow ridge on the melon, in front of the blowhole. The eyes are extremely small and are located above the distinctly upturned corners of the mouth. The dorsal fin is a very low and wide-based triangle about two-thirds of the way to the flukes, which are concave along the rear margin. The broad flippers usually have a flat trailing edge, but it is sometimes scalloped.

These animals are grey, often with a slightly darker dorsal surface. Some Ganges River dolphins may have a pinkish cast to the belly.

The 26 to 39 upper teeth and 26 to 35 lower teeth are curved. The anterior teeth are longer and extend outside of the closed mouth, especially in younger animals, whose teeth have not yet become worn.

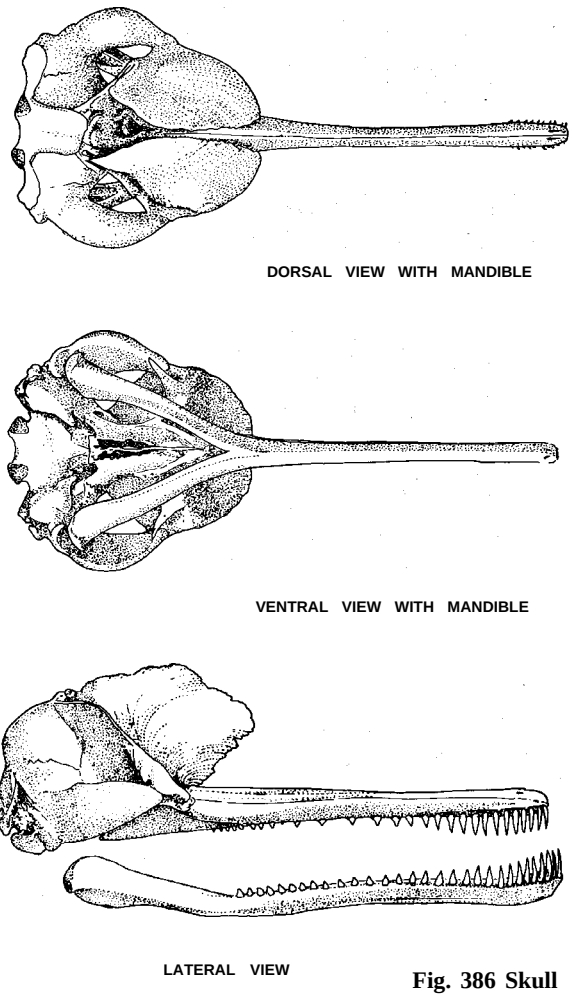


Fig. 386 Skull

Can be confused with: Ganges River dolphins can be confused with several other small cetaceans that **are found** in overlapping areas, mostly near the river mouth. Finless porpoises (p. 192) have no dorsal fin and no beak, lrrawaddy dolphins (p. 118) have no beak, and bottlenose (p. 154) and hump-backed (p. 134) dolphins are much larger and both have prominent dorsal fins that are very different from the low dorsal fin of the Ganges River dolphin.

Size: Female adults are up to 2.6 m and males 2.2 m in length. They can reach weights of at least 108 kg. Newborns are apparently between 65 and 90 cm.

Geographical Distribution: The extensive range of these dolphins includes the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Karnaphuli river systems and many of their tributaries in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. Ganges River dolphins live not only in the main channels, but also during the flood season, in seasonal tributaries, and the flooded lowlands.

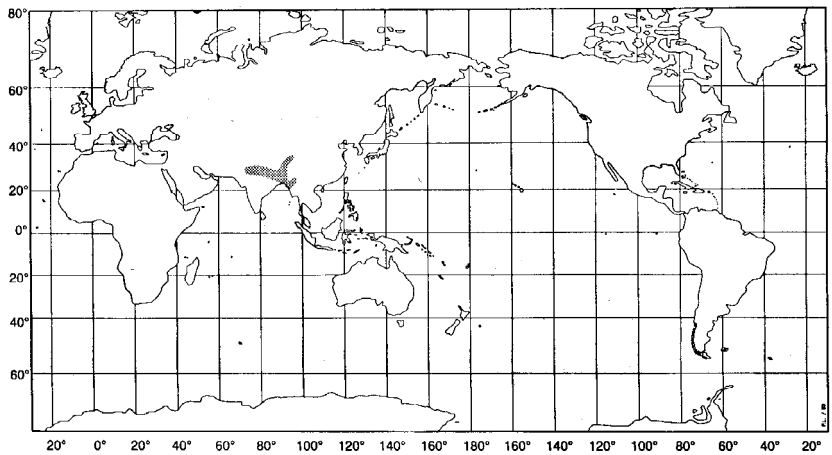


Fig. 387

Biology and Behaviour: As is true for most of the river dolphins, Ganges River dolphins generally live in small groups of less than 10 individuals, and are most often seen alone or in pairs. They are active animals, but they do not often engage in leaps. In captivity, these dolphins appear to spend much of their time swimming on their sides, and they constantly emit echolocation clicks. This is understandable in light of the fact that they normally live in relatively shallow, turbid waters. In fact, Ganges River dolphins are nearly blind, and can probably only detect light levels, and perhaps direction.

Calving apparently can occur at any time of the year, but there may be peaks in December to January and March to May.

These dolphins feed on several species of fishes, invertebrates, and possibly turtles and birds.

Exploitation: All river dolphins face the serious threat of loss of habitat, and the Ganges River dolphin is no exception. Damming and diversion of rivers, pollution of waters, increasing vessel traffic, overfishing of prey species, accidental catches in fishing gear, and direct hunting for meat and oil all threaten the existence of these animals. There are believed to be several thousand Ganges River dolphins left in the world.

IUCN Status: Vulnerable.

Platanista minor Owen, 1853

PLAT Plat 2 **BHU**

FAO Names: En - Indus River dolphin**; Fr -** Plataniste de l'Indus**; Sp -** Platanista del Indus.

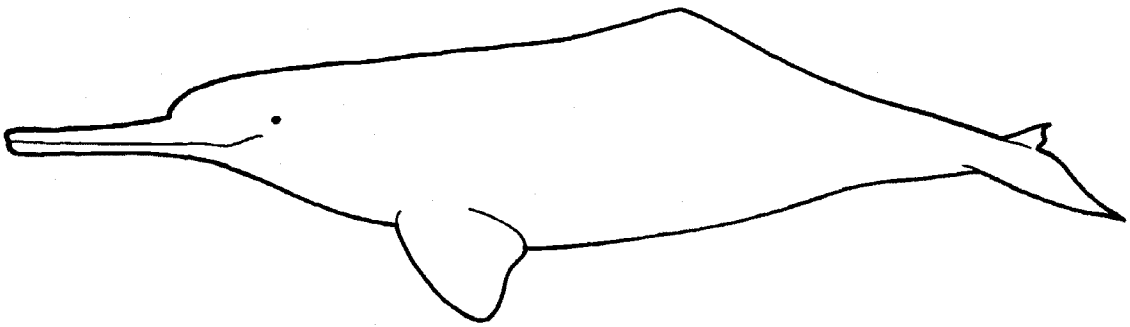


Fig. 388 ***Platanista minor*** **(external appearance apparently identical to that of** ***P. gangetica*****)**

Distinctive Characteristics: Indus River dolphins, or bhulan, are almost identical in external appearance to Ganges River dolphins (p. 194). In fact, some researchers believe that the 2 types would be most appropriately classified as subspecies of ***Platantista gangetica.*** The most distinctive characteristics are the robust body, low dorsal fin, long beak, small eyes, longitudinal blowhole, and elongated front teeth.

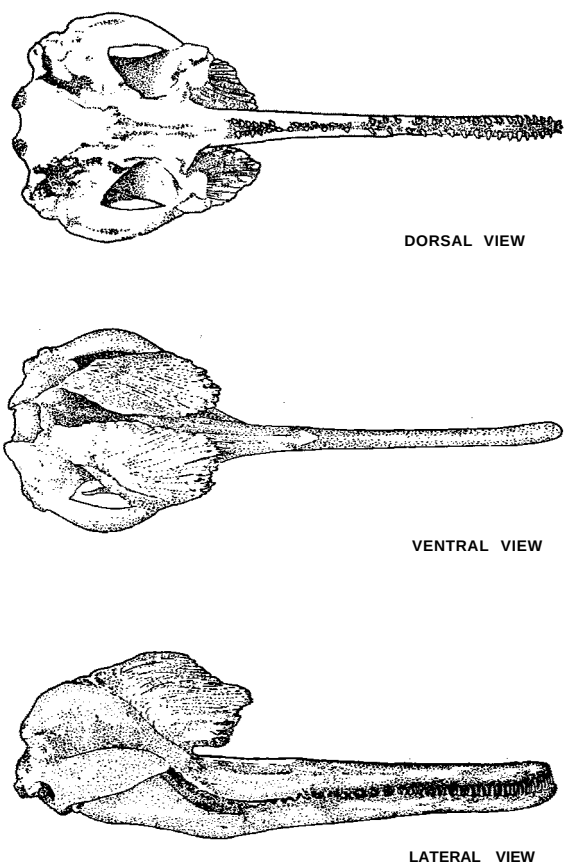


Fig. 389 Skull

Can be confused with: Although their ranges generally overlap only in a small portion of the lower Indus, Indus River dolphins might be confused with Irrawaddy dolphins (p. 118), finless porpoises (p. 192), bottlenose dolphins (p. 154), and Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins (p. 134). The dorsal fins of bottlenose and hump-backed dolphins, complete lack of a dorsal fin in finless porpoises, and absence of a beak in Irrawaddy dolphins should make them distinguishable. Also, bottlenose and hump-backed dolphins are much larger.

Size: Indus River dolphins probably grow slightly smaller than the maximum sizes of 2.6 m (females) and 2.2 m (males) for Ganges River dolphins. Length at birth is between 70 and 90 cm.

Geographical Distribution: Though formerly more widely distributed in the Indus and some of its tributaries, the range is now restricted to the middle and lower Indus River. It is centered between Jinnah and Kotri barrages.

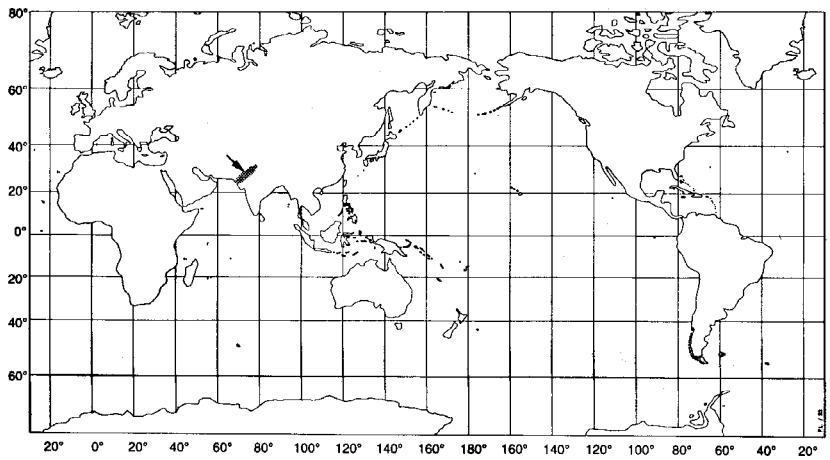


Fig. 390

Biology and Behaviour: Although most commonly seen singly or in very small groups, Indus River dolphins have been reported in loose aggregations of up to 30 individuals. Like their relatives in the Ganges River, they often swim on their sides and appear to navigate mainly with the aid of echolocation.

There is almost nothing known of the reproductive biology of this species. Newborns have been observed in April and May.

Indus River dolphins feed on prawns and several species of fish. They may do much of their feeding on or near the bottom.

Exploitation: The Indus River dolphin is now extirpated in many parts of its former range. Both incidental and direct catches, as well as various forms of habitat destruction (including damming, diversion, and contamination of rivers) represent threats to the survival of the Indus River dolphin.

IUCN Status: Endangered.

Inia geoffrensis (de Blainville, 1817)

INI Inia 1 **BOT**

FAO Names: En - Boto; **Fr - Inia; Sp -** Bufeo.
(Note - boto is the Portuguese name used in Brazil, and has been adopted as the English common name.)

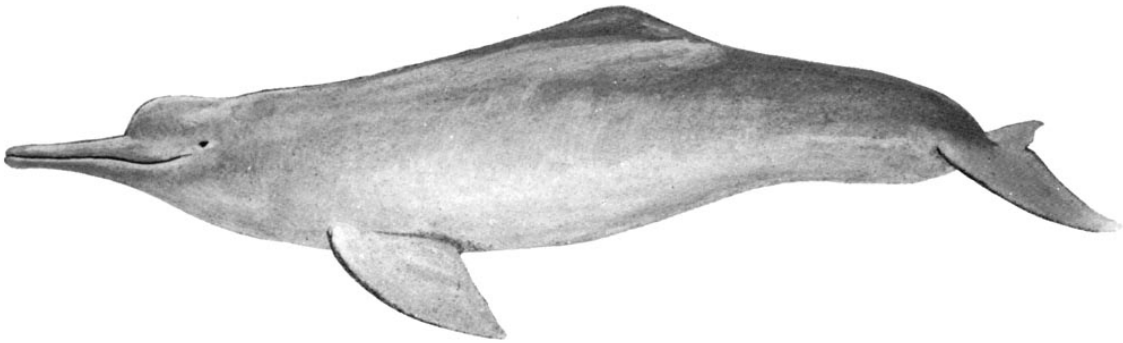
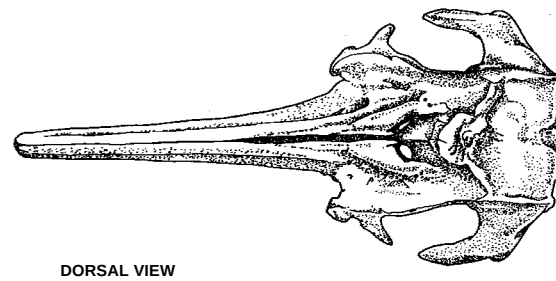


Fig. 391 ***Inia geoffrensis***

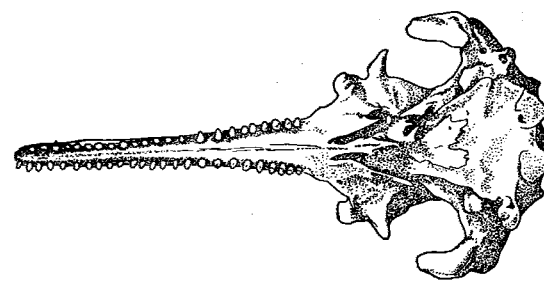
Distinctive Characteristics: The boto, or Amazon River dolphin, is probably the best-known of the river dolphins. These animals are moderately robust, and have long beaks and steep bulbous foreheads, which are capable of changing shape. There is no true dorsal fin, but only a dorsal ridge that is low and wide-based. The flippers are large and triangular, with blunt tips, and the flukes have a concave trailing edge that is often ragged. The eyes are small, but not as small as those of the Ganges River dolphin or Indus River dolphin.

Botos are grey to pink above and lighter below; some individuals are totally pink. In general, young animals are mostly uniform dark grey; they become progressively more pinkish with age. The extreme colour is so unique that the boto is often called the pink dolphin.

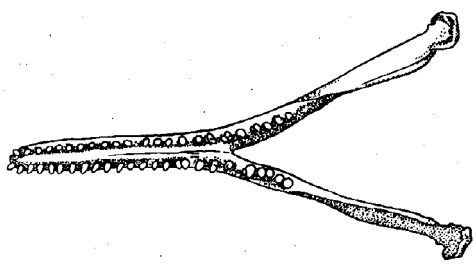
The mouth is lined with 23 to 35 stout teeth in each row. This is the only species of cetacean with differentiated teeth; those at the front of the jaw are typically conical, but those near the rear are flanged on the inside.



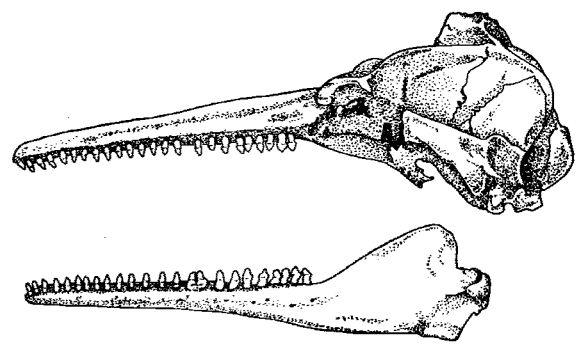
DORSAL VIEW



VENTRAL VIEW



DORSAL VIEW OF MANDIBLE



LATERAL VIEW

Fig. 392 Skull

Can be confused with: The only other dolphin that inhabits the range of the boto is ***Sotalia*** (p. 132). This latter species is much smaller, has a taller dorsal fin, and more spritely dolphin-like movements.

Size: Adult size ranges to 2.3 m (females) or 2.8 m (males). Males can reach maximum weights of 160 kg. At birth, boto are about 80 cm long.

Geographical Distribution: Boto are endemic to the Amazon and Orinoco drainage basins of South America. Their distribution extends to the upper reaches (impassible falls or rapids) of these rivers and their tributaries in Guyana, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, as well as the lower reaches in Brazil and Venezuela. They are found widely not only in the main river channels, but also in smaller tributaries, lakes, and (seasonally) the flooded forest.

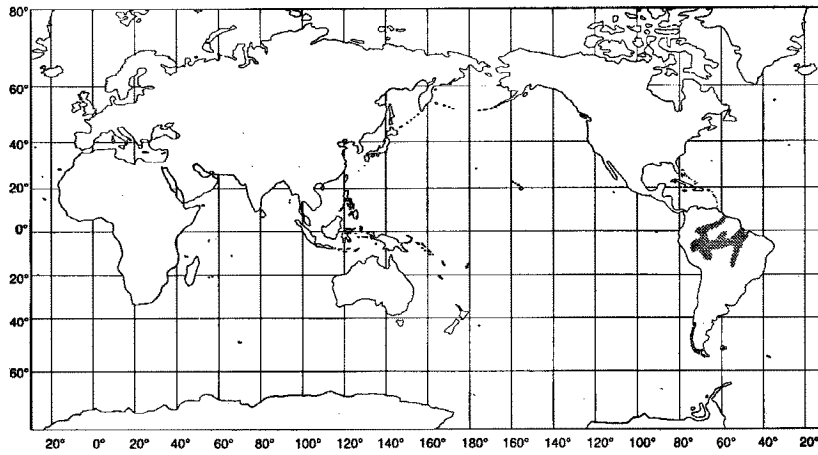


Fig. 393

Biology and Behaviour: Groups of up to 12 to 15 have been observed, but most boto are seen singly or in small groups. They generally move slowly, and surface at a shallow angle, showing the top of the head and the dorsal ridge. Their responses to humans can range from shyness to curiosity.

In Brazil, births apparently occur in May to July, the season of peak flooding.

These animals feed on a large variety of fishes, generally near the bottom. Some of their prey have hard outer shells, and dolphins have been observed breaking up their larger prey before swallowing. They sometimes feed in a coordinated manner, occasionally with ***Sotalia.***

Exploitation: Boto are threatened by various activities, among them are incidental catches in fisheries, damming of rivers associated with hydroelectric development, deforestation, and pollution from mercury mining operations. Significant numbers have been taken for the aquarium trade. Despite these problems, boto are still abundant in many parts of their range. Superstitions surrounding this species provide protection from hunting in many areas of its range.

IUCN Status: Vulnerable.