

Lipotes vexillifer Miller, 1918**PONTO Lipo 1****BTI**

FAO Names: **En** - Baiji; **Fr** - Dauphin fluvial de Chine; **Sp** - Platanista del Yangtze.

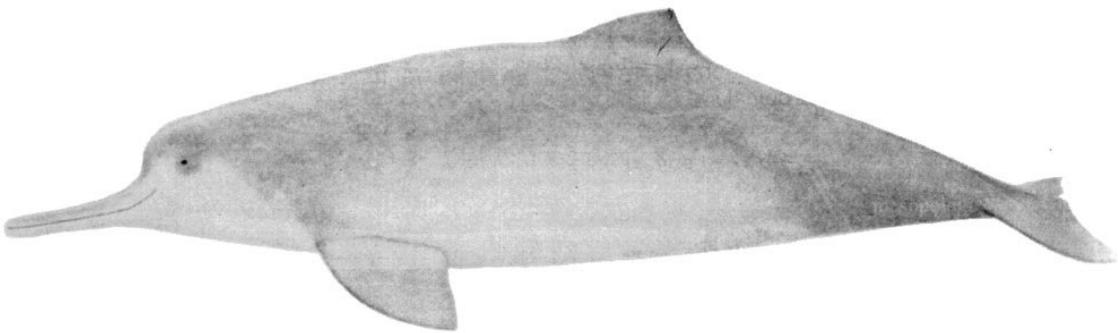
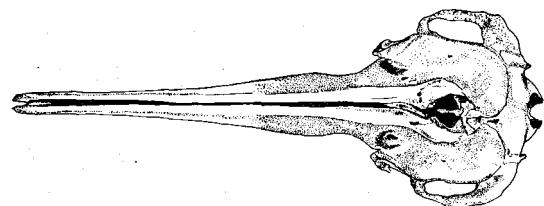


Fig. 394 *Lipotes vexillifer*

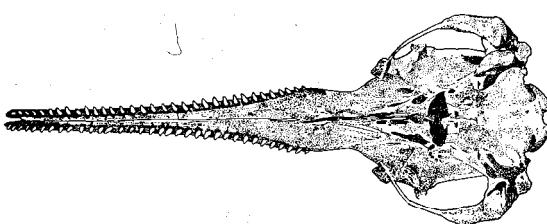
Distinctive Characteristics: Outside of China, very little was known of the baiji's biology until recently. These animals are moderately robust, with long, slightly upturned beaks, rounded melons, low triangular dorsal fins (set about two-thirds of the way back from the snout tip), and broad rounded flippers. The eyes are small, compared to those of oceanic dolphins, but not as small as those of *Platanista* sp.

Baiji, or Chinese river dolphins, are predominantly dark bluish grey above and light grey to white below. There are light brushings on the side of the face and the side of the tail stock.

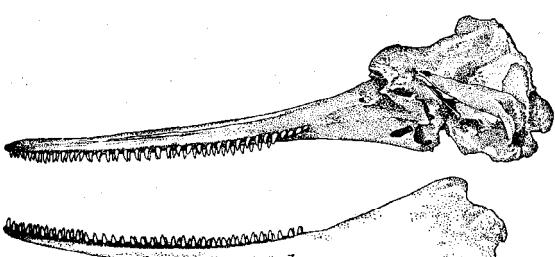
Each tooth row contains 31 to 38 conical teeth.



DORSAL VIEW



VENTRAL VIEW



LATERAL VIEW

Fig. 395 Skull

Can be confused with: The only other small cetacean in the baiji's range is the finless porpoise (p. 192), which can be readily distinguished by its darker coloration and absence of a dorsal fin.

Size: Male baiji reach sizes of 2.3 m and 135 kg, and females reach 2.6 m and over 240 kg. Apparently, newborn baiji are less than 95 cm in length.

Geographical Distribution: The baiji is found only in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River in China. Baiji may occasionally enter large lakes during intense flooding. The range was formerly broader.

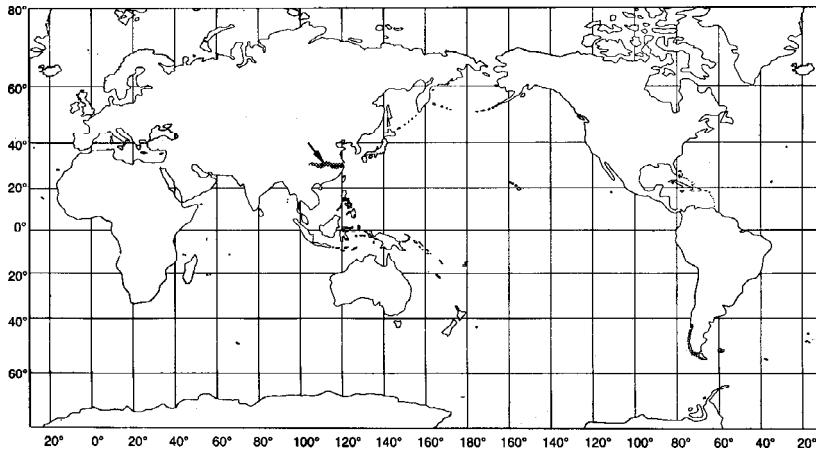


Fig. 396

Biology and Behaviour: Groups of 2 to 6 baiji are most commonly seen, but aggregations of up to 13 animals sometimes form. These dolphins are generally shy of boats, and their surfacings are shallow, often exposing only the top of the head, dorsal fin, and a small part of the back.

The peak calving season appears to be February to April.

A large variety of fish species make up the diet of the baiji.

Exploitation: With the possible exception of the vaquita, this is the most endangered of all cetaceans. The major source of mortality for baiji appears to be incidental catches in fishing gear, especially the so-called "rolling hooks" that are used to snag fish along the bottom of the Yangtze. Other threats include vessel collisions and disturbance, pollution, construction of dams, overfishing of prey species, and general modification of habitat through various human activities. Although China has declared the baiji a "Protected Animal of the First Order," there is still much uncertainty about the future of this species.

IUCN Status: Endangered.

Pontoporia blainvilliei (Gervais and d'orbigny, 1844)

PONTO Ponto 1

FRA

FAO Names: **En** - Franciscana; **Fr** - Dauphin de La Plata; **Sp** - Franciscana.

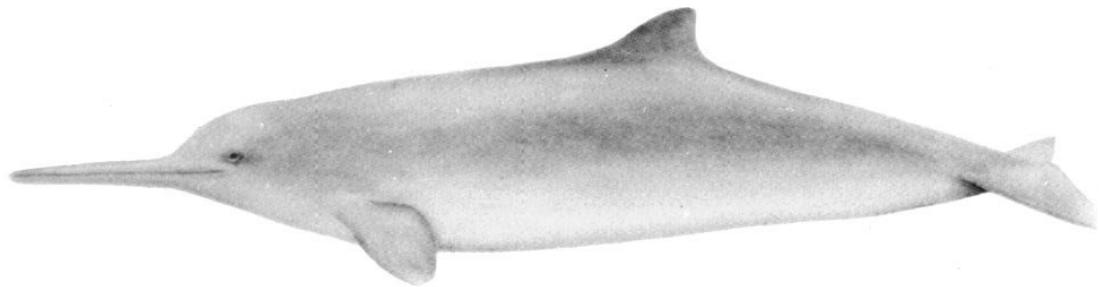


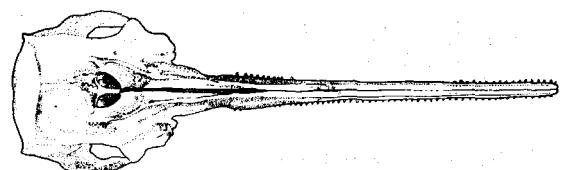
Fig. 397 *Pontoporia blainvilliei*

Distinctive Characteristics: Although not a true freshwater dolphin, this primarily marine species is nonetheless related to them. The beak is extremely long and narrow, and the forehead is steep and rounded. The dorsal fin is low to moderately tall and triangular, with a rounded tip. The flippers are broad and spatulate, with an undulating trailing edge. In many subadults, there are visible ridges along the surface, corresponding to the flipper bones. In calves, the beak is much shorter and stouter than it is older animals.

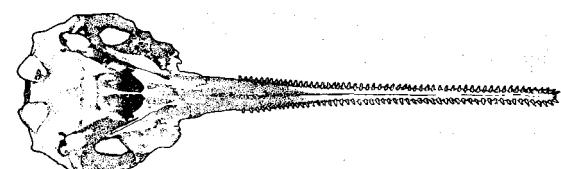
Franciscana are countershaded brownish to dark grey above, and lighter brown (or even yellowish) to grey below and on the lower flanks. A faint dorsal cape is present.

The long beak is lined with 50 to 62 fine pointed teeth per row, more than in nearly any other species of cetacean.

Recent morphological studies have documented the existence of 2 forms of franciscana, a smaller northern and a larger southern one.



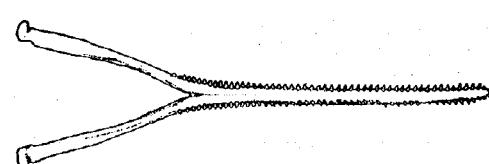
DORSAL VIEW



VENTRAL VIEW



LATERAL VIEW



DORSAL VIEW OF MANDIBLE

Fig. 398 Skull

Can be confused with: Young franciscana may be confused with marine dolphins of the genus *Sotalia* (p. 132), but can be identified by their very long beaks and more rounded dorsal fins.

Size: Males reach 1.63 m, and females 1.77 m in length. Maximum recorded weight is about 34 kg. At birth, franciscana average about 75 cm.

Geographical Distribution: Franciscana are found only along the east coast of South America, from central Argentina to central Brazil. They are primarily coastal, but may be found in some estuaries, and sporadically enter the la Plata River.

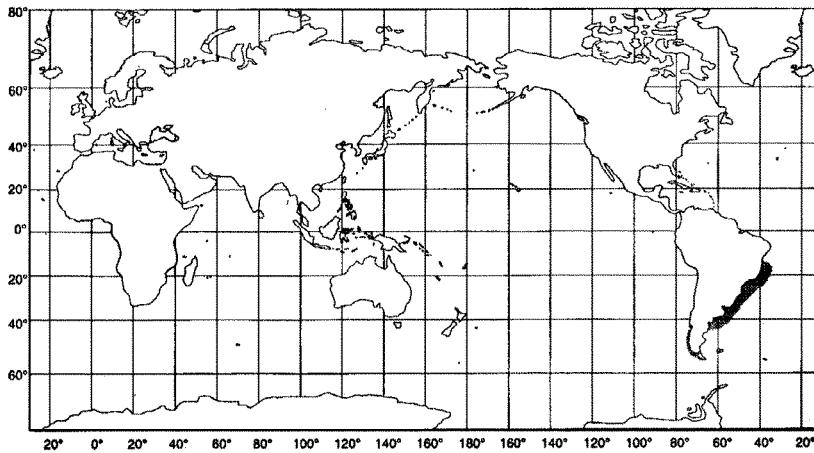


Fig. 399

Biology and Behaviour: There is very little known about the franciscana's natural history. They are found in small groups of up to 5 individuals. In general, they appear to avoid vessels.

Peak calving for this species is in November and December.

Franciscana feed mostly near the bottom on several species of fish, cephalopods, and crustaceans.

Exploitation: Although there are no estimates of abundance, the franciscana is not thought to be in serious danger of extinction. Because they do not live in rivers, these animals are not as burdened with some the threats facing other members of the family. However, incidental catches, mostly of juveniles, in gillnets for sharks and other species of fish are a serious problem. Some commerce in parts from accidentally caught dolphins has been documented. Other environmental problems include pollution of habitat, the effects of vessel traffic, and environmental contaminants.

IUCN Status: Insufficiently known.