

Progress Report

Dolphin in the city: Protecting endangered Irrawaddy dolphins in Can Gio, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam





Summary:

We have successfully carried out all planned field activities in Can Gio Biosphere Reserve in 2023. A total of three boat-based surveys have been conducted in the Can Gio area in April, June, and August 2023, following planned methods to collect data for population estimation and behaviour studies. Initial results showed that Irrawaddy dolphins have been mostly observed in the Long Tau estuary of the study area. More than 10,000 photographs of Irrawaddy dolphins' dorsal fins have been taken, which are being catalogued and prepared for photo-id/Mark-Recapture analysis to yield population estimates. On the 28th and 29th of September 2023, our team organized an exhibition in Can Thanh town, Can Gio area, which had attracted more than 6000 people.

Detailed updates:

Stakeholder engagement: We have engaged the Can Gio Mangrove Biosphere Reserve Management Board and the Maritime Administration of Ho Chi Minh City and involved them in the project activities, as well as prepare for a broader advocacy campaign that aim to protect the Irrawaddy dolphin's core habitats after those area had been robustly identified. The Can Gio Mangrove Biosphere Reserve Management Board featured the Irrawaddy dolphin in their publication for the first time. The head of the Maritime Administration of Ho Chi Minh City and his son did join our field survey in November 2022.

As a result, our team has secured the support from local stakeholders. We are moving to the advocacy stage, where our team undertake a long-term campaign on social media to promote for the conservation of Irrawaddy dolphins in Can Gio and prepare to present our ecological baseline that crystallized from this project to relevant stakeholders. The baseline data is not ready now, as the ecological data on the dolphin population are still being analysed.







Figure 1 Irrawaddy dolphin appeared in the environmental interpretation publication of Can Gio Mangrove Biosphere Reserve.

Field survey: A total of three boat-based surveys have been conducted in the Can Gio area in April, June, and August 2023. Initial results showed that Irrawaddy dolphins have been mostly observed in the Long Tau estuary of the study area. This area is very busy with marine transportation and fishing activities. More than 10,000 photographs of Irrawaddy dolphins' dorsal fins have been taken. Photo-id data are being analysed.

Some pictures of our work on the field are shown below:







Figure 2 Survey team are searching (a) and taking photographs (b) for Irrawaddy dolphins.



Figure 3 (a) A catfish head that is potentially fish prey of the Irrawaddy dolphin was collected during the survey in February 2023; (b) Irrawaddy dolphins are chasing a catfish that is rising out of the water.







Figure 4 Irrawaddy dolphins are chasing a fish of prey (mullet).



Figure 5 Socializing behaviors of Irrawaddy dolphins.





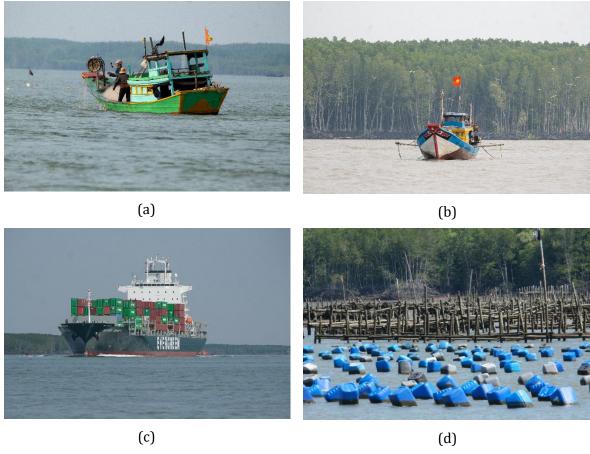


Figure 6 Some kinds of anthropogenic activities recorded in the study area: (a) gill net; (b) trawling; (c) cargo ship; (d) aquaculture farming (e.g., oyster).

Education and awareness raising: On the 28th and 29th of September 2023, our team organized an exhibition in Can Thanh town, Can Gio area. This exhibition coincides with the Whale Festival or "Nghinh Ong" Festival of local fishermen in the Can Gio area which attracted approximately 6,000 visitors. This event is not only focused on Irrawaddy dolphins but also on marine mammals in Vietnam which is expected to raise awareness of communities. We had an Irrawaddy dolphin mascot, and infographics, and organized 5 minigames that raised awareness of the local community on dolphin conservation. We also distributed more than 2000 sets of stickers and posters as a gift for participants who visited the exhibition.





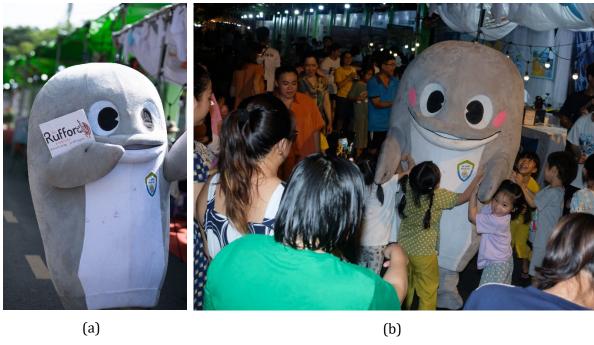


Figure 7 (a) Irrawaddy dolphin mascot; (b) Irrawaddy dolphin mascot attracts many kids and visitors to visit our exhibition booth.

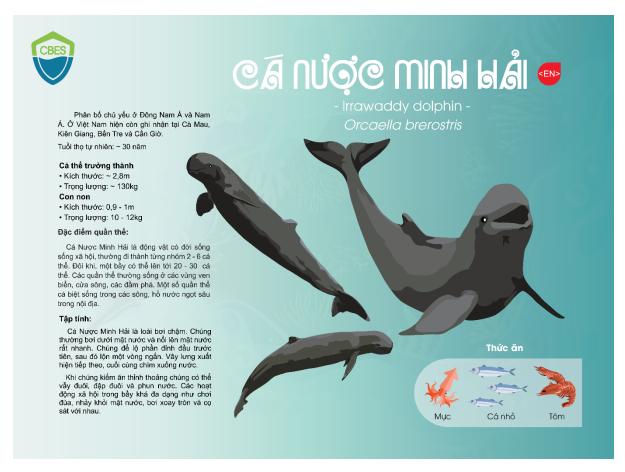


Figure 8 Irrawaddy dolphin infographic has been displayed in the exhibition booth.







Figure 9 Irrawaddy dolphin sticker designed to be distributed to participants in the exhibition.