WDC WHALE AND DOLPHIN CONSERVATION

SAVE THE BLUE

H2OVER ENVIRONMENTAL FOUNDATION

DOLPHINS CAMPAIGN

WDC and SAVE THE BLUE
Dolphin Protection Campaign

Threats to dolphins and other marine migratory species are myriad. Many, if not most, of these threats are linked directly to anthropogenic forces including destructive fishing practices, noise, plastic, and chemical pollution, habitat destruction, ocean warming, acidification, and directed take. In many countries dolphins are exploited for their value in the animal trade and for food.

Many populations are formally categorized as vulnerable or endangered; the baiji, or Chinese river dolphin, was recently declared extinct and several other species, like the vaquita, are in immediate danger of extinction. However, the status of most small cetacean populations is poorly known. In too many cases, too little is known to even assess the population's probability of survival.

OUR CURRENT DOLPHIN CAMPAIGNS: CUTTING-EDGE SCIENCE, RESEARCH, AND EDUCATION PROJECTS.

WDC-Gulf Bottlenose

Gulf of Mexico

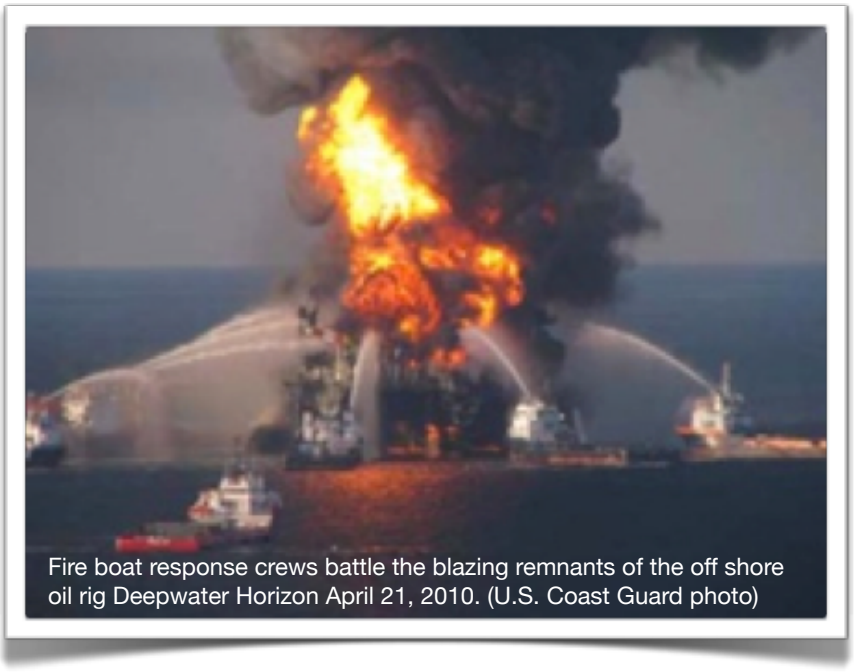
Our search for and reliance upon fossil fuels comes at a cost to the environment. The search for oil and gas adds noise to the oceans, and the process of extraction and maintenance of drilling operations deep into the sea floor releases toxic chemicals into the marine environment.

Similarly, the burning of fossil fuels has resulted in a gradual warming of the global climate, which holds the potential for serious disruption of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and the life reliant upon them. The challenges presented by climate change require an innovative, large scale, long term, and multinational response from scientists, conservation managers, and decision makers.

Striped dolphins (Stenella coeruleoalba) observed in emulsified oil on April 29. Credit: NOAA.

Oil spills cause multiple, subtle, and long lasting impacts on the marine environment and its inhabitants, both directly and indirectly. Ingesting or inhaling the oil or its vapours, can result in sickness and death, while indirect effects include loss of prey or displacement caused by damage to the ecosystem. For instance, there is good evidence to indicate that the Exxon Valdez oil spill resulted in the death of more than a third of the orcas in the local area. Years after the Deepwater Horizon explosion in the Gulf of Mexico, the full impact of the world's worst oil spill remains unknown.

Twenty-eight offshore and coastal species of whales and dolphins inhabit the Gulf of Mexico. During the spill, aerial surveys documented Risso's dolphins, spinner dolphins, bottlenose dolphins, and sperm whales, species commonly found in deep water habitats, swimming in oil in offshore waters. Coastal bottlenose dolphins have been observed with tar balls attached to them and seen swimming through oil slicks closer to shore and inland bays. As they are routinely found traveling, socializing, and feeding very close to shore and inland bays, sounds, and estuarine habitats, it is highly likely these animals will be impacted, and documenting these impacts will take years.



Fire boat response crews battle the blazing remnants of the off shore oil rig Deepwater Horizon April 21, 2010. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

As the Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) process continues, much information has yet to be released to the public regarding initial assessments of the damage to the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem. However, we do know that there have been an alarmingly high number of dolphin deaths this past year in the Gulf, and involve particularly newborn and stillborn strandings. Of the 842 stranded whales and dolphins reported since the UME was declared, 728 of these were bottlenose. According to the **US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration** (NOAA), of these 5% percent stranded alive and 95% stranded dead. Scientific analysis suggests that only 2% of dolphin carcasses were ever historically recovered after their deaths in this region, meaning that the true death toll from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill could be 50 times higher than the number of deaths currently estimated. Understanding that these strandings represent a very low proportion of the true dolphin deaths is critical when considering the magnitude of the impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on other species in our food web.

You can read some of WDC's blogs about their work in the Gulf here [**link to:** **oil development and the Gulf** and **WDC's work in the Gulf**]


Courtesy WDC


Courtesy WDC

Global Dolphin Hunts and Marine ‘Bushmeat’

Dolphins have been targeted for hundreds of years, and continue to be taken in many areas for food, oil, leather, bait, and other uses. The hunting and consumption of wild mammals is common globally, and such exploitation is a major threat to many dolphin species, and a primary threat to some, such as the boto, or Amazonian river dolphin. The terrestrial hunting of wild mammals for food is referred to as ‘bushmeat,’ and the human health and conservation issues surrounding the acquisition and consumption of wild species as a food source are well known. Perhaps this is a good place to give an example of what the health concerns are, possibly reference the mercury poisoning issue. For cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises), the direct hunting of large whales is a familiar issue, but the extent that small cetacean species (dolphins and porpoises) are taken for food is an emerging problem and one of great importance considering the health implications associated with consuming dolphin meat and welfare concerns for those species targeted. The global extent and characteristics of the acquisition of these other marine species for use as human food has received little synthesis until recently, prompting urgent calls for research aimed at assessing the scope of what is termed the “marine bushmeat” problem.


Andrew Sutton


Atlantic Blue

Direct exploitation is driven by the demand for products, whether this means food to be consumed or exchanged at the local level (subsistence); or meat, oil and other commodities to be sold in national or international markets (commercial). This directed ‘take’ of small cetaceans is intentional, and can take many forms: directed hunts for bait or food; lethal culling and targeted removal as part of management regimes or ‘pest control’ measures to address depredation and other human-cetacean conflicts within fisheries; and captures for live removal for captivity.

Opportunistic and local directed takes of small cetaceans occur around the globe utilizing various methods. One exceptionally brutal method is the drive hunt. Fishermen conduct 'drive hunts' of pilot whales (members of the dolphin family) and other small cetaceans in Japan and the Faroe Islands. Through this method, fishermen round up small whales and dolphins with boats, 'drive' them into shallow bays, and slaughter them. The meat is distributed for free (as in the Faroes), or sold in restaurants and local supermarkets in Japan. Human health concerns associated with consuming dolphin meat are real independent long term studies by the National Institute of Health (NIH) in the Faroe Islands have proved causation between mothers' consumption of contaminated pilot whale products and developmental problems in their children.

Toxic substances, such as PCBs and mercury are well known for their negative impact on human health. These contaminants may act as endocrine disruptors, influence male fertility and sex ratio, damage prenatal and neurobehavioral development, reduce immune system function and it is suspected that they are linked to Parkinson's disease, arteriosclerosis and hypertension. Many dolphin species, like humans, are top predators and accumulate high concentrations of toxic substances through the food web. Accordingly, intake of whale and dolphin products may pose a serious threat to human health, especially when consumed regularly or in large amounts.

WDC is working to raise the profile of human health issues associated with the consumption of contaminated meat from dolphin hunts worldwide, and has initiated various efforts to substantiate the risks as well as engage the public, media, health and consumer welfare ministries on this issue. They continue to work collaboratively with grassroots elements in Japan to extend outreach efforts focused on nurturing awareness and opposition to the hunts, through Japan education programs and symposia.

Since the release and worldwide distribution of the Academy Award-winning documentary, *The Cove,* we were hopeful that shining a light on these hunts would be the first step towards their end. Unfortunately, both governments and fishermen remain steadfast in their commitment to kill dolphins for their meat and to sell them alive to marine parks. Through continuing awareness and our commitment to education, outreach, and other initiatives, we believe that the tide will turn and this archaic practice will be abandoned.

PLEASE DONATE, RECEIVE, AND WEAR YOUR EXCLUSIVE DOLPHIN GIFTS AND KNOW YOU ARE HELPING TO *SAVE THE BLUE!*

About the WDC

Since 1987, WDC has supported more than 150 conservation field projects in more than 50 countries, spanning all major ocean regions and relevant river basins. More than half of these projects have focused on the conservation and protection of the 45+ species of dolphins, or odontocetes – otherwise known as toothed whales – that inhabit our seas, oceans, and rivers. WDC is the only global non-government organization dedicated solely to the protection and conservation of whales, dolphins, and their habitats and achieves its aims through campaigning, conservation projects, and world-class science, research and education initiatives. WDC maintains offices in the US, UK, Argentina, Australia, and Germany and a worldwide network of consultants, researchers, and supporters.