

Chinese White Dolphin

The ocean is the origin of all things and is closely related to all lives on earth. The enormous water resources give birth to different types of creatures on land while the ocean is also rich in resources of biodiversity. Therefore, the ocean is one of the important systems to sustain lives of all creatures on earth. A group of highly intelligent marine creatures live in the vast ocean – the cetaceans.

Chinese white dolphins (*Sousa chinensis*), also known as Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins, are marine mammals of the Delphinidae family. Chinese white dolphins and other cetaceans are top level consumers of the marine ecosystem, so conservation of Chinese white dolphins has great benefits and significance to the maintenance of the balance of marine ecology.

Chinese white dolphins are mainly distributed in China, Southeast Asia, Bangladesh in the east and Borneo of Malaysia in the west. According to rough estimation, the number of Chinese white dolphins living in Chinese waters is the largest as known so far. Latest published data indicates that there are about 2,000 to 2,500 Chinese white dolphins in the waters from Pearl River Estuary to Jiangmen.

Situated in the west coast of Pearl River Estuary, Macao is an important distribution area of Chinese white dolphins in Pearl River Estuary. This is largely related to the fact that sea water and fresh water merge together in the waters of Macao with appropriate temperature (25-33°C), salinity (18-33‰) and depth (within 15 metres), gathering a massive amount of fish. In the 85 square kilometres of waters managed by Macao, the distribution of activity areas of Chinese white dolphins in Macao is comparatively uneven, with most of the dolphins found to the east and south of Macau International Airport. In addition, there are a few records of Chinese white dolphin activity in the waters to the south of Coloane and the east of *Ponte de Amizade*.

Although they are named as Chinese “white” dolphins, they are not white during certain periods of their lives and their skin colour changes as they grow in age. The newborn dolphins are greyish black, and the colour gradually fades when they reach youth, creating patches and spots like sesames. When they turn from youth to adults, the spots on their body gradually fade and become white. The Chinese white dolphins that we generally see are pink. It is because their blood vessels dilate when they move, making the white skin appeared to be pink.

In view of factors such as decrease in food, sailing of high-speed ships, marine projects, changes in marine environment, noise and pollution, the number of Chinese

white dolphins has been decreasing. According to the “International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List 2010”, Chinese white dolphin is listed as “Near Threatened”. Meanwhile, it is also listed as “Grade 1 National Key Protected Species” in China and included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendix I, which means that the concerned international trade is completely prohibited. As such, China has set up the “Pearl River Estuary Chinese White Dolphin National Nature Reserve” in Pearl River Estuary, which is adjacent to Chinese White Dolphin Nature Reserve Area in Hong Kong, so that Chinese white dolphins can continue to live in the beautiful ocean.

The Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau