

# **New population of rare Irrawaddy dolphins found in Palawan**

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Some Irrawaddy dolphin populations are classified by IUCN as critically endangered. Credit: Mavic Matillano

A new Philippine population of critically-endangered Irrawaddy dolphins was reported recently by WWF-Philippines.

Spotted by chance off Quezon, Palawan in Western Philippines, this pod of rare marine mammals, locally called Lampasut, was observed displaying typical behavior, foraging for prey around lift net fish traps sitting approximately one kilometer offshore.

WWF staff reported seeing at least 20 individuals in just one sighting.

This is a relatively large sized pod for this uncommon [species](#), where groups of fewer than six individuals are most common.

Previous populations of these [dolphins](#) have been documented in Malampaya Sound, as well as off the island of Panay.

The Quezon pod represents the fourth known group of Irrawaddy dolphins reported in the Philippines.

The Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*), is a euryhaline species of oceanic dolphin.

With the ability to adapt to a wide range of salinities, this dolphin is found in discontinuous subpopulations near coasts and in estuaries and rivers in areas stretching from the [Bay of Bengal](#) to [New Guinea](#) and the Philippines.

Lightly colored all over, Irrawaddy dolphins are similar to the [beluga](#) in appearance. They have a blunt, rounded head, and an indistinct beak. Their dorsal fin is short, blunt and triangular.

In the wild, they have been seen spitting out streams of water, a rather unique and peculiar behavior.

Contrary to what some people believe, this animal is not a true river dolphin, but an oceanic dolphin that lives in brackish water near coasts, river mouths and in estuaries.

This species enjoys the highest level of international protection. All trade is forbidden, under international agreements. Some Irrawaddy [dolphin populations](#) are classified by the IUCN as critically endangered.

This includes the Malampaya Sound sub-population in the Philippines.

Irrawaddy dolphins in general however, are IUCN listed as a [vulnerable species](#), which applies throughout their whole range.

In 2004, CITES transferred the Irrawaddy dolphin from Appendix II to Appendix I, which forbids all commercial trade in species that are threatened with extinction. The Irrawaddy dolphin is listed on both Appendixes I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.

Photos of the Quezon pod were captured, positively confirming species identity. For Palawan, this is a very good sign. Though wholly unexpected, this surprise is a tremendous new discovery to celebrate Earth Day in the Coral Triangle.

Provided by WWF

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