

# Deaths of 3 endangered Cambodian dolphins raise alarm

December 26 2022, by Sopheng Cheang

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A Mekong River dolphin appears on the Mekong River at Kampi village, Kratie province, northeast of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on March 17, 2009. Three endangered freshwater dolphins have died within less than 10 days of each other, alarming conservationists in Cambodia. The death of a third healthy dolphin in such a brief period indicates "an increasingly alarming situation and the need for an intensive law enforcement be urgently conducted in the dolphin habitats," the World Wildlife Fund said in an announcement Monday, Dec. 26, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Heng Sinith, File

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The latest Irrawaddy dolphin death—believed to have stemmed from entanglement in an illegal fishing line—spotlighted the need for [law enforcement](#) to help save the species, also known as the Mekong River dolphin, according to the statement.

The WWF said the body of a healthy female dolphin estimated to be between 7 and 10 years old was found floating in the river Saturday in the eastern province of Kratie. It said an examination of its carcass suggested that the dolphin, 196 centimeters (6 1/2 feet) long and 93 kilograms (205 pounds), had been hooked and wrapped in a tangle of fishing line.

Seng Teak, WWF Cambodia director, said in the statement that without immediate action "the recent increase in illegal fishing activities in the dolphin conservation areas" would destroy the Mekong River dolphin population in Cambodia.



This photo provided by the World Wide Fund (WWF) shows a carcass of a Mekong dolphin on the Mekong river bank at Koh Trung, Kratie province, Cambodia, Saturday, Dec. 24, 2022. Three endangered freshwater dolphins have died within less than 10 days of each other, alarming conservationists in Cambodia. The death of a third healthy dolphin in such a brief period indicates “an increasingly alarming situation and the need for an intensive law enforcement be urgently conducted in the dolphin habitats,” the World Wildlife Fund said in an announcement Monday. Credit: Eam Sam Un/WWF via AP

The statement advocated stepping up day and night patrols to protect the remaining dolphins in [conservation areas](#).

The first census of Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia in 1997 estimated their [total population](#) was about 200. In 2020, the population was estimated to have fallen to 89.

WWF said 11 dolphins have died in 2022, bringing the total number of deaths to 29 in the past three years.





This photo provided by the World Wide Fund WWF shows a carcass of a Mekong dolphin on the Mekong river bank at Koh Trung, Kratie province, Cambodia, Saturday, Dec. 24, 2022. Three endangered freshwater dolphins have died within less than 10 days of each other, alarming conservationists in Cambodia. The death of a third healthy dolphin in such a brief period indicates “an increasingly alarming situation and the need for an intensive law enforcement be urgently conducted in the dolphin habitats,” the World Wildlife Fund said in an announcement Monday. Credit: Eam Sam Un/WWF via AP

The Irrawaddy dolphin is classified as an [endangered species](#) by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Other groups of these dolphins are found in two other freshwater rivers: Myanmar's Irrawaddy and Indonesia's Mahakam on the island of Borneo.

In February, Cambodian wildlife officials announced the death of the last known Irrawaddy dolphin in a population on a stretch of the Mekong River further upstream, which appeared to be caused by entanglement in a fishing net.

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