



European Cetacean Society
(ECS)

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The European Cetacean Society is a learned society dedicated to research on whales, dolphins and porpoises. Its membership exceeds five hundred marine mammal scientists from around forty countries.

The Society would like to draw attention to the recent results of an expedition, the "Yangtze Freshwater Dolphin Expedition 2006" organized by the Swiss baiji.org Foundation, confirming that the baiji or Yangtze river dolphin (*Lipotes vexillifer*) is "functionally extinct".

This would be the first case of a marine mammal going extinct since Steller's sea cow (*Hydrodamalis gigas*) was eradicated some 250 years ago and the Caribbean monk seal (*Monachus tropicalis*) perhaps fifty years ago. It would be the first cetacean species to have become extinct within the last thousand years.

In this era of nature conservation, and 15 years after the Convention on Biological Diversity was ratified by most countries of the world, this extinction is especially noteworthy because we saw it coming and could have, should have, prevented it.

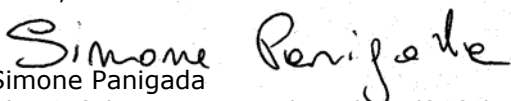
The disappearance of this dolphin, one of the world's oldest mammal species (present for at least 20 million years) and the last representative of an entire family, was a consequence primarily of unselective, unregulated fishing practices and wholesale degradation and modification of its habitat. The baiji was regarded in China as the "goddess of the Yangtze" and was fully protected under Chinese law. It may therefore be the first large mammal driven to extinction by the unintentional actions of our own species.

In the beginning of the 1980s, there were thought to be several hundred baiji in the Yangtze. A 1997 survey produced only 13 confirmed sightings. "Qi Qi", a male baiji that was rescued from fishing gear in 1980, died in July 2002 at the Institute of Hydrobiology in Wuhan, China, and the last confirmed sightings of a baiji occurred in September 2004.

The endangered population of Yangtze finless porpoises (*Neophocaena phocaenoides asiaeorientalis*) in the Yangtze river system is in a state similar to that of the Yangtze river dolphin 20 years ago. We urge you to do everything in your power to prevent the porpoises from ending up like the Yangtze river dolphin.

We mourn the fate of baiji and sincerely hope that it will not be shared by another mammal anywhere in the world.

Yours,


Simone Panigada

Chair of the ECS Council, on behalf of the membership