

KAMBODSCHA

Das Cambodian Marine Mammal Conservation Project

It is important to close regional knowledge gaps about the Irrawaddy dolphin. And it is important to raise awareness of the dolphins and their importance in the ecosystem among the government and the population. Finally, the development of specific legislation to protect the Irrawaddy dolphin will protect the species and its critical habitats.



Report by Alissa Böhm

The project aims to actively protect the Irrawaddy dolphin population in Kep and Kampot on the Gulf of Thailand in southern Cambodia and to promote the increase of the population and support the development of a healthy ecosystem. Marine Conservation Cambodia (MCC) was established in 2008 with the aim of protecting, conserving and enhancing Cambodia's marine environment. Following the successful implementation of Cambodia's first Marine Fisheries Management Area (MFMA) in Koh Rong Samleom, MCC moved to Koh Ach Seh Island in the Kep Archipelago in 2014 to continue marine research and conservation, and to address the problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU)

fishing in the archipelago's waters. In 2018, MCC successfully collaborated on the implementation of Cambodia's second MFMA, the Kep Archipelago, which protects Kep's shallow marine habitats of coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangrove forests, which are important habitats for a range of endangered marine species including sea turtles, seahorses and Irrawaddy dolphins.

In 2017, MCC established the Cambodian Marine Mammal Conservation Project, which focuses on the protection and conservation of Irrawaddy dolphins in Kep. Through research, outreach and legal protection, the Cambodian Marine Mammal Conservation Project (CMMCP) continues to work to protect the Irrawaddy dolphins and their habitat today. Through observations from land and boat, the CMMCP collects important baseline data on the population, distribution, behaviour and ecology of Irrawaddy dolphins in the archi-

pelago. This data is compiled and published in government reports, technical articles and educational materials for schools and local communities.

The new, high quality binoculars allow us to sight and track dolphins, which are documented and identified through the dorsal fin photos taken by the new digital camera. This data also allows us to identify areas of conflict and critical habitat, animal behaviours and population estimates, which are crucial to understanding and protecting this species.

A video is being produced that will be broadcast nationwide to inform the public about Cambodia's important marine ecosystems and endangered species, their main threats and ongoing conservation efforts. The professional footage will hopefully get people in Cambodia excited about marine life and encourage coastal and riverine communities to get involved in marine protection and conservation activities.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, CMMCP has focused on building a local research team. In February 2020, four Cambodian staff began an intensive 10-week research and training programme, where they learned data collection and compilation and how to use scientific equipment. In April 2020, CMMCP qualified the first fully Cambodian marine mammal research team (with an average success rate of 96%). This team continues research to this day, spending 12-20 hours per week collecting data in the form of land and boat surveys. This data is shared with local and national authorities on a monthly basis.

In September 2021, we again continued most of our projects with an international team of scientists - this time with a clear focus on training Khmer people at universities and in the field, as well as supporting local and national institutions against illegal fishing. In the meantime, we have been able to ensure that a local team can continue our important research on the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin population. An important contribution to this is the full equipment of the research team in Cambodia and the payment of the

lead Cambodian researcher through the project funds provided.

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14.401 EUR

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