

Project Update: March 2016

January and February are part of the long holiday period here in Peru and the new academic year has started recently (mid-March 2016), also Cédric was in Belgium during these 2 months and the education project was on hold and we will reorganise conferences as from April 2016. In the meantime we have participated to the activities related to the Earth Hour, volunteers of Solinia being active during the preparation and during the event organised by the council of Iquitos. Our travelling exhibition about river dolphins was a great success with again a lot of questions about these wonderful animals.

Observations were successful and we have now 2 years data from March 2014 till February 2016, a publication (draft) will be proposed before end of this year but we can already list the following results (2015 vs 2014):

- The number of pink river dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis*) is higher, probably because by experience we know where they stay around Iquitos and we can focus on these areas.
- The number of grey river dolphins (*Sotalia fluviatilis*) is lower, this is also a general comment received from tourism agencies working in the Pacaya Samiria National Reserve - we need to analyse this. A possible cause is the overfishing in the region but it seems in 2016 the number is already increasing and we can observe more babies and juveniles.
- The pink dolphins prefer the areas with low deep and shallows, especially along the beaches during the dry season and the flooded islands during the rainy season. This is a confirmation of existing observations and scientific publications. They are not afraid of human presence and rather curious when listening noises (motor, etc.) and sometimes swimming close to the fishing nets probably trying to catch fishes. Regularly we have seen groups of pink river dolphins following our boat during several minutes. Regularly we can observe isolated individuals.
- The grey dolphins stay in the main channels but are regularly fishing along the banks where fishes are concentrated. Unlike the other species, the grey river dolphins are more fearful and do not approach to the boat especially when the motor is noisy. But they seems curious anyway, when there is a big noise we can regularly observe groups of *Sotalia* swimming and jumping far away probably to escape and at the same time to observe what's doing such noise. Sometimes we have seen young ones swimming close to the boat, juveniles are not always under stress.
- Concerning threats the river traffic is important, especially high speed boats that can cause accidents and injuries. A speed limitation will be proposed to the authorities in some specific areas.
- Another major problem is the competition with fishermen who are sometimes trying to push dolphins away by throwing objects on the animals. Also the use of long nets in the confluences is limiting the crossing.

A positive impact of the organisation of the workshop with tourism agencies last year is that local guides are pushing the observation of dolphins in the right way, with responsibility and care. We follow-up regularly with them to try to continue the good work.

Last year we have visited several times Tamshiyacu, there is clearly a need to invest time and effort in this town (which is situated 1 hour speed boat from Iquitos) as the competition with fishermen is higher than in other areas. If possible we plan to mix the education and observation projects and to include students of a secondary schools in a programme of regular observations from the bank and a boat.

We are busy to create the next poster that we will use for the communication, we would like to emphasise on the development of ecotourism with river dolphins.

Concerning other events and projects, we are regularly invited to make communication about river dolphins during events organised by the municipality and other associations. Also during the international cross triathlon the first week of July 2016 and during the international raft race the last week of September 2016, Solinia will organize conferences in the communities and activities during the events.



