

Sperm whale, vulnerable species at the international level
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CARI'MAM



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PRESS RELEASE

More than 35 scientists of the Caribbean region issue a call to action for the conservation of marine mammals

The Greater Caribbean Region includes more than 35 species of marine mammals, one fifth of which are classified as threatened and several as near-threatened, on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Only a few decades ago, the monk seal, the only resident seal species in the region, disappeared.

Thus, within the framework of the CARI'MAM project, many scientists from across the region are calling on governments and policy makers to lead actions to address the threats to the conservation and well-being of marine mammals in the region.

This call is based in particular on the analysis of the 2012 Regional Marine Mammal Action Plan adopted by the Conference of the Parties of the International Convention on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol) and the assessment of current threats to these species.

Old and new threats

Although the situation of marine mammals varies greatly from one territory to another, a number of human pressures remain important in the region. For example, marine mammals are regularly caught in nets as bycatch, or end up entangled in fishing gear. While these practices have devastating effects on individuals and populations of marine mammals throughout the region, appropriate measures remain largely inadequate in many countries. In addition to involuntary catches, some countries in the region still allow the hunting or capture of animals without any assessment of the populations of the impacted species, despite their obligations under the SPAW Protocol.

At the same time, while the continued economic development of the region is more than welcome, it unfortunately comes with an increase in noise and chemical pollution in the marine environment. The development of oil and gas exploitation in some parts of the region, especially along the South American coast, is of great concern to experts.

This growth is often associated with the development of transportation routes between countries. In addition to significantly increasing noise pollution, the development and expansion of commercial shipping in the region may also be responsible for direct injuries to marine mammals.

A new model of society for the Caribbean of tomorrow

The crisis that the world is going through in general, and the Caribbean in particular, highlights the need to review our model of society. The abusive extractivism of the last century puts the environment under pressure, creating in turn unfavorable conditions for human beings.

In that way, the destruction of marine mammals and their habitat is itself in conflict with the development of commercial marine mammal watching initiatives which, when practiced in a reasoned manner, can bring sustainable benefits to communities and the local economy.

In the same order of idea, consumption of local products and the relocation of activities reduce the acoustic and chemical pressure produced by international trade on cetaceans while favoring the local development of the territories.

The Caribbean specialists invite the public to support without reserve the conservation of these animals by relaying this message to their elected officials.

The CARI'MAM project

The international cooperation project CARI'MAM (Caribbean Marine Mammals preservation network) is co-financed by the European program INTERREG CARAIBES since 2018 and coordinated by the Agoa Sanctuary. It has helped strengthen a network of actors involved in marine mammal conservation throughout the Caribbean through exchanges, the development of management and assessment tools, or the strengthening of skills.



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Call to action for Caribbean marine mammals

We, the undersigned researchers, scientists, non-governmental organisations and marine protected area managers involved in the conservation of marine mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR), acknowledge the numerous threats that these species face within our waters and issue this call to action.

Noting that the WCR is a hotspot for marine mammal biodiversity, with 35 species present in the region, a fifth of them classified as threatened, and several classified as near threatened under the IUCN's Red List of Species;

Noting the relatively recent extinction of the Caribbean monk seal, the Marine Mammal Action Plan was adopted by Parties of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA);

Acknowledging our collective hope that other Caribbean marine mammal species will not experience the same preventable outcome.

In order to prevent the decline of marine mammal species and their extinction in the WCR, we call upon governments and policy makers to prioritize their actions to address the ongoing threats to the conservation and welfare of marine mammals in the region.

For example, marine mammals are consistently caught as bycatch, or entangled in fishing gear, by fisheries practices in the region. Despite these actions having devastating impacts on marine mammal individuals and populations throughout the region, they have yet to be appropriately addressed by countries and fisheries organizations.

Furthermore, some countries in the region still allow for the direct hunting or take of animals for captivity, despite recommendations adopted during COP10 of the SPAW Protocol calling for countries to prohibit the direct take of marine mammals in accordance with their obligations under the Protocol, and without any population assessments on the impacted species. These practices often conflict with the development of commercial marine mammal watching initiatives that can provide long-term benefits to local communities and economies, if well practiced.

Simultaneously, the continued economic development of the region increases the amount of noise and chemical pollution within the marine environment every year. The ongoing development of oil and gas exploitation in some parts of the region, particularly along the coasts of South America, causes serious concern given the considerable impacts that anthropogenic ocean noise and oil spills can have on all marine life, as demonstrated by the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill catastrophe.

The development and increase in commercial shipping in the region, besides drastically increasing acoustic pollution, may also be responsible for direct injuries to marine mammals. In a post-Covid world, local consumption and relocalisation of activities are compatible more than ever with the conservation of marine mammals.

In addition to these direct threats, global climate change is affecting sea levels, prey distribution and migration patterns, making cetaceans more susceptible to other risks.

We, the undersigned, call upon the public to support this call to action for the sake of future generations and relay it to policy makers. We further urge policy makers to prioritize marine mammal protection and take action to prevent the extinction of other species by adapting and enforcing national and regional regulations to ensure their protection.

The conservation of WCR marine mammal species will contribute to the sustainable development and conservation of the unique natural heritage of the WCR and align with the mandate of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols.

This statement results from collaborative work led by specialists and based in particular on the scientific and technical analysis of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean (<https://tinyurl.com/e9yw5mk7>), both realized through the Caribbean marine mammals conservation network (CARI'MAM).

Signed by

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