



eChapter 4 Extinction

The Yangtze River Baiji, a rare white dolphin that survived for twenty million years, is effectively extinct, according to a recent announcement by the Baiji.org Foundation. The [most recent sighting](#) was in 2004.

Chinese writings in the 3rd Century B.C. estimated this freshwater dolphin's population at approximately 5,000 Baiji on the Yangtze River. According to news reports, an estimated 400 dolphin remained in the early 1980s.

The combination of river pollution, increased shipping, overfishing, and loss of habitat cut the number to 13 confirmed sightings in 1997. By year-end 2006, there were none left, based on baiji.org's intense six-week search. None survive in captivity. The species is gone.

The extinction of the Yangtze River Baiji is the first loss of large aquatic mammal since the Caribbean monk seal's extinction in the 1950s.

FACT: If the current rate of species extinction continues, or accelerates as now seems to be the case, the number of species becoming extinct in the next decade could number in the millions. [\[source\]](#)

Connections

The Yangtze River carries billions of tons of cargo to and from international markets. The ship sounds confounded the sonar that the nearly sightless Baiji used to find food. Too often the ships accidentally hit these intelligent mammals. The Baiji struggled under the stress of habitat loss (Three Gorges project) and severe river pollution.

The low price of made-in-China products currently is based only on the cost of Chinese labor and materials. If environmental costs are included, many consumers might find made-in-China products are just too expensive. What price for losing the Baiji forever?