

## Foreword

### Special Issue: Biology and Conservation of Humpback Dolphins (*Sousa* spp.)

At its annual meeting in Shimonoseki, Japan, in April 2002, the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) Small Cetacean Subcommittee reviewed the status of humpback dolphins (*Sousa* spp.). At that meeting, researchers from around the world studying humpback dolphins presented 24 papers on various aspects of their biology and status. It was such a great wealth of knowledge on this mysterious group that I felt a published collection of papers should result. This special issue of *Aquatic Mammals* grew out of that set of papers, with 12 of them represented in some form among the 16 chapters included in this volume.

Humpback dolphins have remained one of the most poorly known groups of cetaceans, despite their widespread distribution in the eastern Atlantic and Indo-Pacific Oceans and their coastal habits. That is beginning to change with the advent in the last few years of long-term studies in South Africa and Hong Kong, and the initiation of other detailed studies in West Africa, the Middle East, India, Australia, and China. We finally are beginning to learn about the biology and ecology of these interesting animals. Although our knowledge is still nowhere near as complete as it is for the bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops* spp.), another genus of widespread and highly variable coastal (and offshore) dolphins, we are nonetheless making great progress. These studies are showing, among other things, that humpback dolphins are highly divergent in both morphology and behavior, and they have apparently undergone many unusual adaptations to the varied environments in which they live. Unfortunately, our recent knowledge has not yet solved the taxonomic controversies that surround these dolphins, and there is still great disagreement over such basic issues as how many species comprise the genus. Current hypotheses range from one to five, but it appears that most researchers feel that two or three species are valid. For the purposes of this volume, we have asked all the authors to provisionally follow the IWC's standard of recognizing two species, the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*) and the Atlantic humpback dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*).

Even the common names have been controversial. Until recently, about half of the world's marine mammalogists used "hump-backed dolphin" and the other half used "humpback dolphin." In 1999, at the 13<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, Maui, Hawaii, a group of researchers studying humpback dolphins met and squabbled over this issue. After some discussion, they agreed that the spelling "humpback" should be used for consistency with the humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). We later recommended in the literature that this be followed in all future writings on the genus (Jefferson & Karczmarski, 2001), and I repeat this wish here. It may seem like a minor issue, but names are important, and consistency in their use is required to avoid confusion.

All papers in this volume received anonymous peer-review by at least two referees. In order to achieve a fair peer-review for those papers that I authored or co-authored, the process for those papers was handled by *Aquatic Mammals* Editor, Jeanette Thomas, in an anonymous fashion.

This volume is comprised of five papers on taxonomy and population biology, six papers on behavioral ecology and life history, and five reports on the status of humpback dolphins in well-studied portions of their range. They are presented in geographical order, moving from west to east across the range of the genus. The volume represents a fairly comprehensive review and analysis of knowledge on these animals as of 2003. It is my hope that this volume will serve as a useful summary of what is known about these animals for many years to come.

I thank all of those who participated in the IWC Small Cetacean Subcommittee meeting for their contributions, and especially to Andrew J. Read, the subcommittee chairman, for coordinating the effort. Jeanette Thomas was very receptive to the idea of this special issue, and it could not have been completed without her enthusiastic support and determined efforts to help bring the volume to fruition. I also thank the numerous reviewers for their hard work, many of whom remain anonymous. Finally, I express my gratitude to all the authors for their outstanding contributions.

Over the next few years, it is likely that at least some of the taxonomic controversies of the genus *Sousa* will be resolved through detailed work currently in progress on molecular genetics and further work on morphometrics. If the progress of research on humpback dolphins continues at the current pace, we may be in a position in a decade or so to fill in many of the gaps in our current knowledge. Such a situation is highly desirable if we are to preserve these unique dolphins and protect them from the many human-related threats facing them throughout their range.

#### **Literature Cited**

Jefferson, T. A., & Karczmarski, L. (2001). *Sousa chinensis*. *Mammalian Species*, 655, 1-9.

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