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Rare finless porpoise netted

By Tiki Rajwi | Published: 09th August 2016 03:07 AM | Last Updated: 09th August 2016 03:07 AM

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: How scant is our knowledge of vulnerable and endangered marine species became evident here the other day after an adult finless porpoise and a calf were accidentally trapped in the fishing nets at Valiyathura.

Although a local marine biodiversity group rushed to the spot, they arrived too late to save them. One of the seven porpoise species, the finless porpoise (Little Indian Porpoise - Neophocaena phocaenoides) is distinguished by the lack of a dorsal fin; and it is the only porpoise to lack one. They are rarely found in the sea off Kerala, and according to Friends of Marine Life, the Valiyathura-based group which identified them, this is the first time they have being sighted in this region.

The mammal is listed as 'vulnerable' by the IUCN Red List and is a Schedule 1 species under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, FML convener and researcher Robert Panipilla said. "Dolphins and whales can be sighted often in our waters, but porpoises such as these which have flat teeth like humans and lacking dorsal fins are rare," he said. "If we had arrived a little bit early, we could have saved them. We tried reintroducing the calf into the sea, but it got washed back by the waves," he said.

Adult finless porpoises grow upto 1.5 metres long, and the calves are roughly 50 cms. Their upper body is bluish grey in colour, and their belly is white. Their diet consists of small fish, crabs and shrimps. The unfortunate incident once again highlights the need to creat awareness about the endangered and vulnerable marine species, said FML members. "In many countries, when such species are found, steps are taken to create awareness about them and about the need to protect them. The government should urgently take such measures," Panipilla said.

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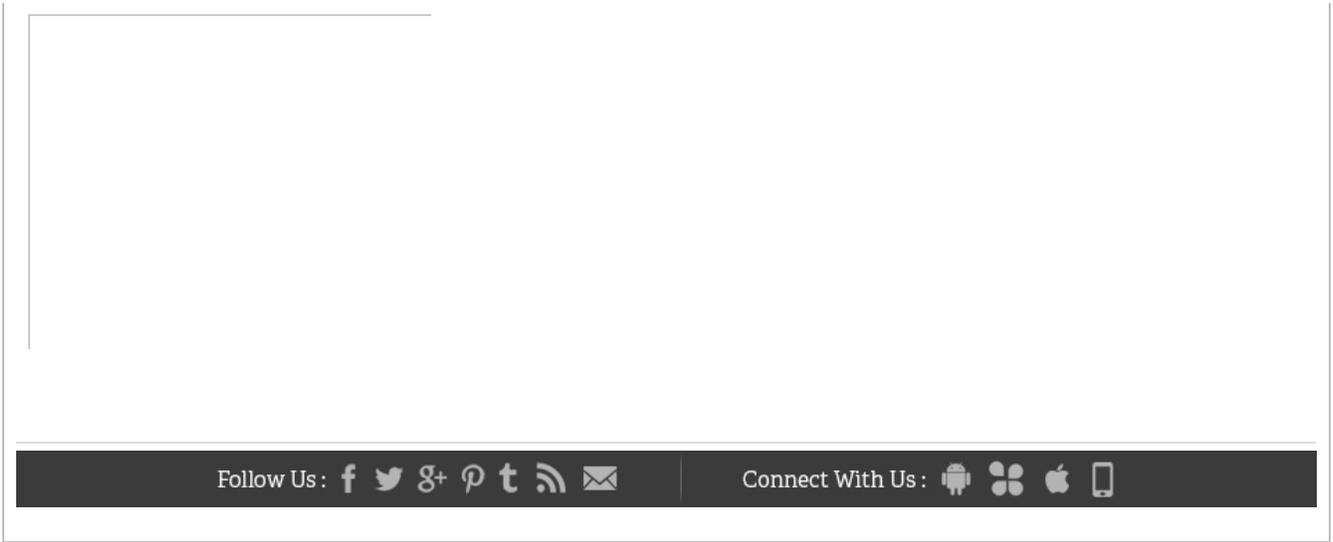
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