

River Dolphins

Have you ever heard of pink dolphins?

¹ When most people think of dolphins, they imagine the gray, friendly-looking creatures that live in the ocean. Although these are the most well-known type of dolphins, more than 20 other species exist. Almost all dolphins live in the salty, warm waters of oceans around the world, but four species live in freshwater rivers. Of these four, the pink Amazon river dolphin, or *boto*, is the most unusual.

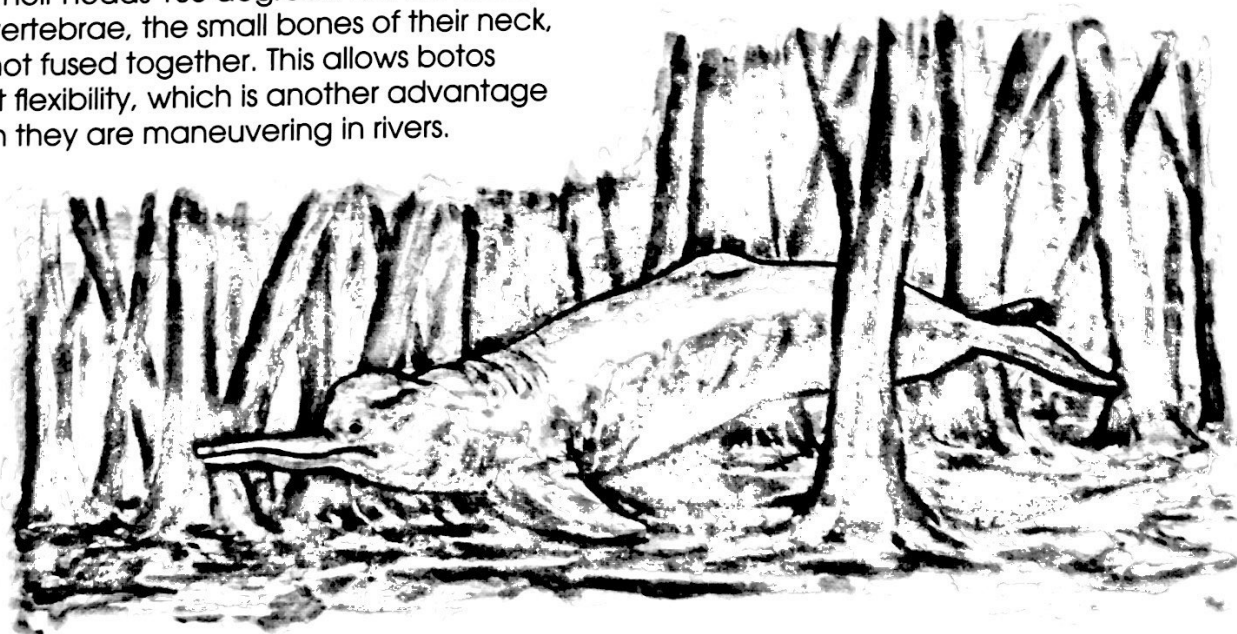
² The colors of botos vary quite a bit. Some have only a slight pinkish tint to their skin, but others are as bright and vivid as flamingos. Scientists still have not determined why the botos' skin is pink or why there is so much variation. Some theories have to do with the amount of time the dolphin is in the sun or how physically active it is. The one thing scientists do know for sure is that the young botos are blue-gray in color and do not develop their pink coloring until they are adults.

³ The unusual coloring of pink dolphins is not the only thing that distinguishes them from their more common cousins. Botos also have long, thin, beaklike noses that help them catch fish in hard-to-reach places. Unlike other species of dolphins, they can turn their heads 180 degrees. This is because the vertebrae, the small bones of their neck, are not fused together. This allows botos great flexibility, which is another advantage when they are maneuvering in rivers.

⁴ In the low-lying river areas of South America, the forests frequently flood during the long rainy season. The water actually becomes deep enough that botos are able to swim through the forests, using their natural flexibility to make their way in between trees! The flooded forests make a good temporary home for the pink dolphins. There is a good supply of fish, and they are protected from fishermen's nets.

⁵ Conservation groups are worried about the future of botos in South America. People generally do not hunt the dolphins because there are many myths and legends surrounding these animals. However, the dolphins do compete with fishermen for food. Botos can become tangled in fishermen's nets and drown. There is also an increasing problem with pollution in the rivers where the dolphins live.

⁶ Botos are not currently an endangered species, but they are not far from becoming one. Scientists, conservationists, and concerned people are doing their best to make sure that these friendly pink creatures remain safe and protected in the warm waters of South American rivers.



Write the words from the passage that have the meanings below.

1. a light shade of a color

_____ Par. 2

2. very bright and strong

_____ Par. 2

3. difference

_____ Par. 2

4. sets apart or makes different

_____ Par. 3

5. blended or joined together

_____ Par. 3

6. Check the best summary for paragraph 5.

- ___ Myths and legends surround the pink dolphin.
- ___ Conservation groups have reason to be worried about pink dolphins.
- ___ Rivers where botos live are becoming more polluted.

Write **F** before the sentences that are facts. Write **O** before the sentences that are opinions.

- 7. ___ More than 20 species of dolphins exist.
- 8. ___ Dolphins tend to have friendly faces.
- 9. ___ Botos do not develop their pink coloring until they are adults.
- 10. ___ Because of their unusual coloring, botos are the most beautiful species of dolphin.
- 11. ___ More should be done to help protect botos.
- 12. Name two threats to the safety of botos.

13. Why do South Americans tend not to hunt botos?

