

## SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION

# The correct use of the vernacular names for South American dolphins genus *Sotalia* Gray (Mammalia, Cetacea, Delphinidae)

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**ABSTRACT.** The usage of the vernacular names for South American dolphins genus *Sotalia* Gray, 1866 is discussed in accordance to geographic characteristics of local people identification.

**KEY WORDS.** Gray dolphin; taxonomic status; Tucuxi.

**RESUMO.** O uso correto de nomes vernaculares dos botos sul-americanos do gênero *Sotalia* Gray (Mammalia, Cetacea, Delphinidae). O uso de nomes vernaculares para os botos sul-americanos do gênero *Sotalia* Gray, 1866 são discutidos de acordo com as características geográficas das identificações feitas pelas populações litorâneas.  
**PALAVRAS-CHAVE.** Boto-cinza; status taxonômico; Tucuxi.

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Coastal dolphins in South America of the genus *Sotalia* (Cetacea, Delphinidae) were described by GRAY (1866) based on a single specimen's skull from French Guyana. The name *S. guianensis* was erected by VAN BÉNÉDEN (1864), *S. fluviatilis* by GERVAIS & DEVILLE (1853) for specimens of the Amazon basin and *S. brasiliensis* by VAN BÉNÉDEN (1875) for specimens exclusively from the Guanabara Bay, in Rio de Janeiro. Studies showed that the genus occurs from Florianópolis region, in Santa Catarina (SIMÕES-LOPES 1988) up to Honduras (SILVA & BEST 1996), being also observed in some coastal habitats as estuaries (GEISE *et al.* 1999), bays and rivers (SILVA & BEST 1994, 1996). An unpublished study (cited in MONTEIRO-FILHO *et al.* 2002) pointed out some cranial differentiation among *S. guianensis* and *S. fluviatilis* samples but proposed the genus as being monotypic. This approach, even in disagreement to the taxonomic rules was accepted by most researchers (e.g. RICE 1998, SILVA & BEST 1996, WILSON & REEDER 2005), who also recognizes a single species – *S. fluviatilis* – with two ecotypes, one marine and one of freshwater.

Recently, CUNHA *et al.* (2005) showed, based on molecular evidence, that the two ecotypes actually correspond to well-defined taxonomic units, thus deserving to be granted specific level. *Sotalia guianensis*, the marine species, and *S. fluviatilis* that inhabit the Amazon basin were already separated by MONTEIRO-FILHO *et al.* (2002) on morphometric grounds. These authors showed that they are different in cranial shape. Consequently, the synonymy proposed in the 1980s (SILVA & BEST 1994, 1996) must now be considered invalid.

Ecological and biogeographic approaches also corroborate such taxonomic status, as the marine *Sotalia* occurs in almost all South and Central America coastal areas (SILVA & BEST 1994, 1996, MONTEIRO-FILHO *et al.* 2002), and the freshwater species is probably restricted to the Amazon basin. Further investigations concerning the entrance of marine specimens in the riverine area of the Amazon river, and its extent, and the usage of coastal area by freshwater specimens may provide more detailed information about sympatry or even inbreeding and genetic flow.

Together with the synonymization adopted by all aquatic mammals researchers, the usage of the Amazonian popular name for *Sotalia*, which is commonly known there as 'Tucuxi' was improperly adopted for the former marine ecotype of *S. fluviatilis* (WILSON & REEDER 2005). As such popular name is completely unknown by fishermen and other local people in the whole Brazilian coastal area, such denomination is not in agreement with the so-called usage of vernacular names. Thus, in order to follow the correct taxonomic status of these two species, I suggest the adoption of 'Tucuxi' (derived from the Tupi language), only for *S. fluviatilis*. Other common names will also be better used for marine *Sotalia* from French Guiana up to Honduras, in Central America, according to local tradition, as Guiana white dolphin, guiana river dolphin (HUSSON 1978) or Guiane Dolphin (RICE 1998). In the Brazilian coastal area *S. guianensis* is usually called by fishermen and expertise as 'boto' or 'boto-cinza' (gray dolphin) (e.g. MONTEIRO-FILHO *et al.* 2002, DAURA-JORGE *et al.* 2004) or estuarine dolphin (e.g. WATSON 1988,

DAURA-JORGE *et al.* 2005). The vernacular name gray dolphin is also used for *Grampus griseus* (Rice, 1998). Such duplication of vernacular names by local population is common and different according to the region where each of those species are more commonly seen by fishermen, making a correct identification through such denomination only acceptable after a careful certification.

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