

Cultural Daily

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Say goodbye to the Vaquita

Rob Lang · Wednesday, March 22nd, 2017

Here's an animal to meet while you still can! The vaquita (Spanish for "little cow"). The few vaquitas that are still alive reside in the northern part of the Gulf of California. They're the smallest members of the dolphin and whale (cetacean) family. There's about 30 of them left, so they'll probably become extinct pretty soon.

Let's meet one now:



There were about 60 left at the time of this photo (in late September, 2016)

So, why are these cute little cetaceans disappearing? Gill nets! In Mexico, fishermen use gill nets to harvest shrimp in the vaquita's territory. You can learn more about it at boycottmexicanshrimp.com.

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Easy. There's another reason that got the swimming little cow on the brink. A fish that's also endangered called the totoaba (or rather, the totoaba's falsely medicinal swim bladder):



The totoaba and vaquita are tangled together in the Sea of Cortez as they struggle against extinction. The totoaba is illegally fished for its very expensive swim bladder. Eastern medicine says that its dried swim bladder is helpful for skin and circulatory problems. The high price that this poaching can get often snags our little friend the vaquita. The illegal poaching, plus the fact that the totoaba needs fresh water to breed but can't get enough because of the trickle that now drips in from the mouth of the Colorado River doesn't bode well for the survival of either animal.

Good luck little vaquita!

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