

Researchers use drones to study pink river dolphins in Brazil

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.23.18

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Image 1. World Wildlife Fund-Brazil Conservation Specialist Marcelo Oliveira gets back a drone during the field work of EcoDrones expedition at Mamiraua Sustainable Development Reserve in Amazonas state, Brazil, on June 29, 2018. Drones are the new allies of investigations on Amazon River dolphins, a tool that will reduce costs and lengths of investigations. Photo by Mauro Pimentel / AFP/Getty Images

A hoarse sound suddenly wakes the visitors in the middle of the night. They are staying in a floating house on the Jaraua River in Brazil's Amazon rainforest. The house serves as a base camp for environmentalists. They are studying animals in the Mamiraua Reserve.

Amazonas is a state in Brazil. It encompasses the Amazon rain forest area and the Mamiraua Reserve. The reserve is about 300 miles from the capital city of Manaus. During flood season, this reserve fills with water, so people live in floating houses and use boats for transportation.

The researchers are from the Mamiraua Institute and the World Wildlife Fund-Brazil. With all the flood water, their nearest neighbor is a caiman they call Dominique. A caiman is a reptile that is a member of the crocodile family. It looks like a cross between an alligator and a crocodile. Dominique has decided to squat for the day at the end of their house.

But the surprising noise turned out to be something entirely different.

River Dolphins Breathing Sounds Scary!

"Don't worry! That's just the river dolphins breathing. It's scary in the middle of the night, right?" biologist Andre Coelho says.

The next day scientists board two boats. They slowly navigate the endless spread of water-filled forest throughout the reserve.

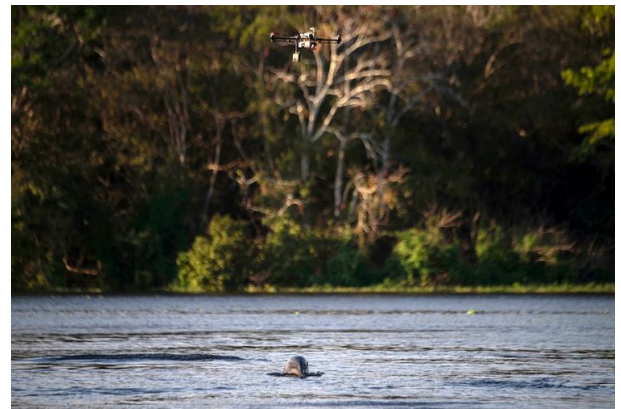
The landscape around them looks prehistoric, older than human history. The researchers use a drone to help them watch the Amazon's pink river dolphins.

A drone looks like a small, handheld aircraft and is remote-controlled. Drones often carry cameras and fly over areas that humans cannot reach easily. The drone allows researchers to track the river dolphins and photograph them.

Monitoring Populations

This voyage in late June is the last in the series of a project called EcoDrones. The project monitors populations of pink river dolphins and another type of dolphin called the tucuxi.

"We need to understand their behavior and habits so that we can propose policies for their preservation," said Marcelo Oliveira. He works for the World Wildlife Fund-Brazil.



Drones "are a tool that will reduce costs and speed up the investigations," said oceanographer Miriam Marmontel. She represents the Mamiraua Institute.

New Imaging Cameras Allow Work At Night

The project is using new imaging cameras to allow work at night. "We can observe the animals at times when before it was impossible," Oliveira said.

Some of the research will be sent to the University of Liverpool in England. The university hopes to develop a method for scientists to identify each dolphin during their observations.

"There are many different Amazons in what we call the Amazon jungle," said Marmontel. Each region has its own challenges.

"Our monitoring means we can understand how to preserve animals in each region." Her team wants to know "what the dangers are and how they can be faced."

Quiz

- 1 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-4].
- Select the detail from the introduction that shows that the Mamiraua Reserve is in a distant and remote area of the Amazon rain forest.
- (A) The house serves as a base camp for environmentalists. They are studying animals in the Mamiraua Reserve.
 - (B) Amazonas is a state in Brazil. It encompasses the Amazon rain forest area and the Mamiraua Reserve.
 - (C) The reserve is about 300 miles from the capital city of Manaus. During flood season, this reserve fills with water, so people live in floating houses and use boats for transportation.
 - (D) The researchers are from the Mamiraua Institute and the World Wildlife Fund-Brazil. With all the flood water, their nearest neighbor is a caiman they call Dominique.
- 2 Read the section "River Dolphins Breathing Sounds Scary!"
- Which sentence from the section explains that drones allow researchers to learn things they would have trouble learning otherwise?
- (A) They slowly navigate the endless spread of water-filled forest throughout the reserve.
 - (B) The researchers use a drone to help them watch the Amazon's pink river dolphins.
 - (C) A drone looks like a small, handheld aircraft and is remote-controlled.
 - (D) Drones often carry cameras and fly over areas that humans cannot reach easily.
- 3 Which two choices are MAIN ideas of the article?
- 1. *The Mamiraua Preserve is a flooded area of the Amazon with many dolphins.*
 - 2. *A group of researchers is hoping to learn more about river dolphins in the Amazon.*
 - 3. *Drones help researchers in the Amazon's flooded and challenging environment.*
 - 4. *There are many different areas of the Amazon that have different characteristics.*
- (A) 1 and 2
 - (B) 2 and 3
 - (C) 3 and 4
 - (D) 1 and 4
- 4 Select the answer that summarizes the article.
- (A) Researchers are using drones as a faster, easier way to monitor the populations and behaviors of Amazon river dolphins in order to preserve them.
 - (B) Researchers from the World Wildlife Fund have observed caimans, dolphins and other animals during their stay in the Amazon's Mamiraua Reserve.
 - (C) Drones are being used to photograph and monitor pink river dolphins and tucuxi dolphins in a new research project called EcoDrones.
 - (D) Drones are handheld aircraft that have cameras that allow them to work and take photographs of the Amazon rain forest at night.

Answer Key

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