

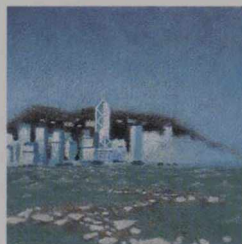
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We set off early on Sunday morning from Queen's Pier beneath sullen skies. By the time we passed between the 200-metre Tsing Yi towers that will become the Tsing Ma Bridge, the rain was falling fast and furious. On board, the crew of journalists and conservationists had gone below.

Within half an hour, the skies had cleared. We had chugged passed the remains of The Brothers islands, passed the site of the airport at Chek Lap Kok, and reached our hunting ground. It was here, off Tap Shek Kok, that we were to look for *sousa chinensis*, the Chinese White Dolphin. An hour later, we were still looking.

Suddenly, a shout: "Dolphin!" Up from the grey green water rose a long narrow snout, high curved forehead followed by a long smooth back and then, a distinctive dorsal fin. Finally, a fluked

tail disappeared below the waves. This startling dolphin, the colour of strawberry ice-cream, could have been imagined by a child. Over the next few hours we saw more dolphins, some the same surprising pink, others blushing a delicate sea shell pink, often marked with the blue grey reminiscent of the bottle nose dolphin with which most people are familiar.



The dolphins have fled the destruction of The Brothers, two islands that have been reduced to five-metre plateaus, to the waters around Lung Kwu Chau, Tree Island, and Sha Chau, south of Shekou and north of the Chek Lap Kok site. With all the development in Hong Kong, their future is uncertain.

The dolphins, which range in colour from snow white through grey to rosy pink, were first reported in the Pearl River Delta in 1757. A century later, the first museum specimens were cap-

tured in the Fuchow River and 1,200 kilometres up the Yangtze at Hangkow. Despite their long history in the Territory, little is known about them. But since 1990, dolphin watchers have noticed a decline in the number of pink dolphins sighted. Lindsay Potter, a researcher on the Chinese White Dolphin Project, which initiated "The Day of the Dolphin" count on 15 May, believes there are as few as 40 pink dolphins in Hong Kong waters, although she believes there may be more in Chinese waters, and up the Pearl River.

The problem is, nobody knows for sure. And nobody knows just how the dolphins are being affected by the sewage, industrial waste, dredging, dumping, and reclamation that are part of the everyday abuse Hong Kong heaps into its harbour. The Chinese White Dolphin Project, now in its fifth month, is a three-year study to determine if and how the dolphins are threatened by existing pollution, as well as the anticipated sewage from the new airport and town develop-