



# Witness to Extinction: How We Failed to Save the Yangtze River Dolphin

*Samuel Turvey*

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The tragic recognition of the extinction of the Yangtze River Dolphin or baiji in 2007 became a major news story and sent shockwaves around the world. It made a romantic story, for the baiji was a unique and beautiful creature that features in many Chinese legends and folk tales. The Goddess of the Yangtze, as it was known, was also the lone representative of an entire and ancient branch of the Tree of Life. But perhaps the greater tragedy is that its status as one of the world's most threatened mammals had been widely recognized, yet despite wide publicity virtually no international funds became available.

Samuel Turvey here tells the story of the plight of the Yangtze River Dolphin from his unique perspective as a conservation biologist deeply involved in the struggle to save the dolphin. This is both a celebration of a beautiful and remarkable animal that once graced one of China's greatest rivers, its natural history and its role as a cultural symbol; and also a personal, eyewitness account of the failures of policy and the struggle to get funds that led to its tragic demise. It is a true cautionary tale that we must learn from, for there are countless other threatened species that will suffer from the same human mistakes, and whose loss we shall not know until it is too late.

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