

MEXICO

Conservation Connections March 2026



The Species: Resilient Against the Odds

The vaquita porpoise (*Phocoena sinus*), also known as the "panda of the sea" is the world's smallest porpoise and most endangered marine mammal. The vaquita is endemic only to Mexico. With as few as around 10 individuals believed to remain, every single detection is a victory. Despite the challenges of illegal fishing in their habitat, recent sightings of mothers and calves prove that the vaquita is reproducing and still fighting to survive.

A Critical Turning Point

Today, I want to share a profound message of hope from Mexico's Upper Gulf of California. Our support is currently fueling the high-tech mission to save the vaquita.

While the numbers are small, the research we support is proving that these "pandas of the sea" are resilient. By combining cutting-edge genetics with advanced acoustics, we are ensuring that even if we can't see them, we can protect them.



What They Are Doing: High-Tech Detection

1. The eDNA Breakthrough:

- Project: A Validated eDNA Workflow for Monitoring Vaquita.
- Led by: Dr. Tania Valdivia Carrillo (CIBNOR) and Dr. Barbara Taylor.

The Technology: Due to the rarity of sightings in murky waters, they are utilizing environmental DNA (eDNA). By examining a simple cup of water, they can identify the genetic "footprint" of a vaquita. This initiative employs droplet digital PCR (ddPCR) to guarantee reliable detections, even under the most difficult circumstances.



Building the Future: In 2026, they will train local youth observers to gather these samples from small boats, empowering the local community to become active protectors of the species.

2. Acoustic Sentinels:

- Project: Vaquita Acoustic Detectors
- Led by: Dr. Barbara Taylor

The Technology: Acoustic detectors serve as "underwater ears," capturing the distinctive clicks of the vaquita. This information enables them to accurately map the locations where these animals are found, offering a non-invasive method for continuous population monitoring. This data is now being used to guide the Mexican Government on where to place concrete blocks with hooks designed to snag illegal gillnets.





Why This Gives Us Hope?

The goal of these projects is not just to count the remaining vaquitas, but to provide a field-ready detection protocol that supports real-time enforcement.

The message is clear: The vaquita is still here.

While the species remains on the brink, the research proves they are reproducing and are capable of recovery if given a truly safe habitat.

Through Dolphin Quest's contribution of nearly \$60,000 this year alone, we are giving these porpoises a voice and providing the auditable evidence needed to keep them safe.

The Message for Our Team

The work we fund in Mexico proves that extinction is not the only outcome. When we combine Dolphin Quest's resources with eDNA and real-time acoustic monitoring, we are doing more than just watching a species—we are building the fortress they need to recover.

Dolphin Quest is dedicated to the vaquita species, having supported VaquitaCPR, an international collaboration to intervene to save the vaquita. This project has advanced marine science and its lessons are now helping conservation for other threatened small cetaceans globally.

Research more:

[Pilot Project to Test Viability of Detecting Vaquita Porpoise Presence Through Environmental DNA \(eDNA\)](#)

[IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group Letter and Analysis Regarding the Vaquita and CITES Compliance Action Plan](#)

[VAQUITACPR](#)