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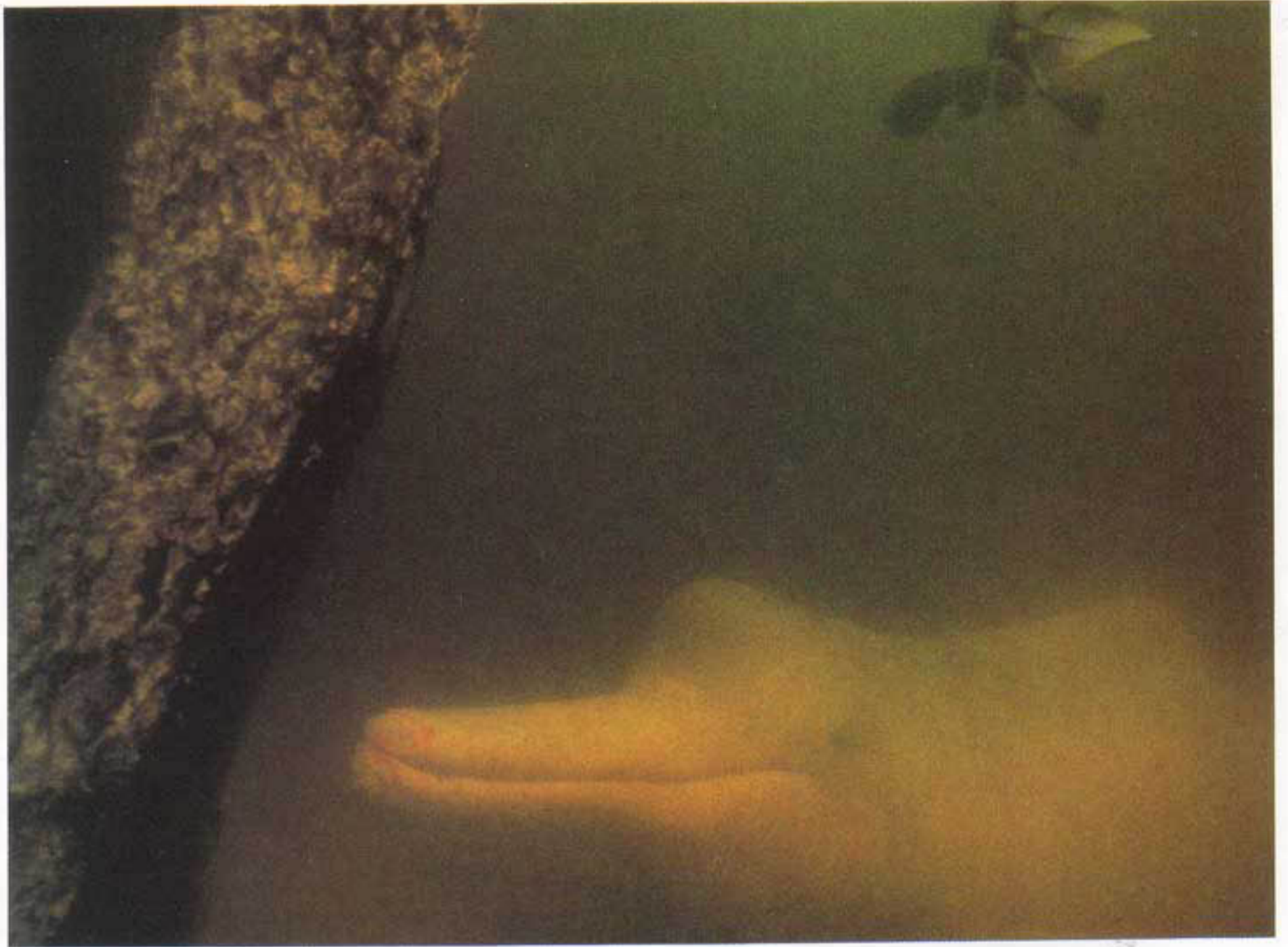
September 1983



DOLPHIN LOG



The Ugly Dolphin



Scientist and crew member, Dick Murphy, wrote home to his kids to tell of his experience with an Amazon river dolphin called Inia, which the Calypso team had captured. Here's his letter.

May 10, 1983

Hi Greg and Jeanne,

I have spent the last three days with a female river dolphin. She's a little longer than six feet (1.8 meters), white and pink, with very small eyes. She was shy when I first went into the pen with her. Slowly I got closer and she became more curious, coming up to check me out with her sonar. I could tell she was using sonar by the way she moved her head back and forth, beaming sound at me. I stroked her as she passed. She let me scratch her tummy, back, and tail. I gently grabbed her tail and pectoral fin, and she pulled me along. Eventually, I could put both my arms around her and scratch her with both hands. She

seemed to like this and rolled over and over in my arms! She often wrinkled her tummy when I scratched her. It's remarkable that a wild dolphin became accustomed to a human in a few days and allowed such handling. I would have been scared in her place.

We caught some fish to feed her and threw a few in the pen. They quickly swam off and the dolphin didn't notice. I decided to hold one in my hand. She swam to me, nosed about the fish, grabbed it sideways, and munched on it. I could hear the crunching of teeth on bones. Crunch, crunch. Now and then a fish would escape from my hand and swim away. The dolphin would take off in pursuit and disappear into the murky water.

I ran out of fish and had a problem. How do you communicate to a dolphin that you have run out of fish and fingers are not to be eaten? The answer, of course, is that the dolphin knows that fingers are not fish. My problem was that I wasn't sure she knew this. I was a bit tense as she zeroed in on my hands. I hurriedly put them over my head,

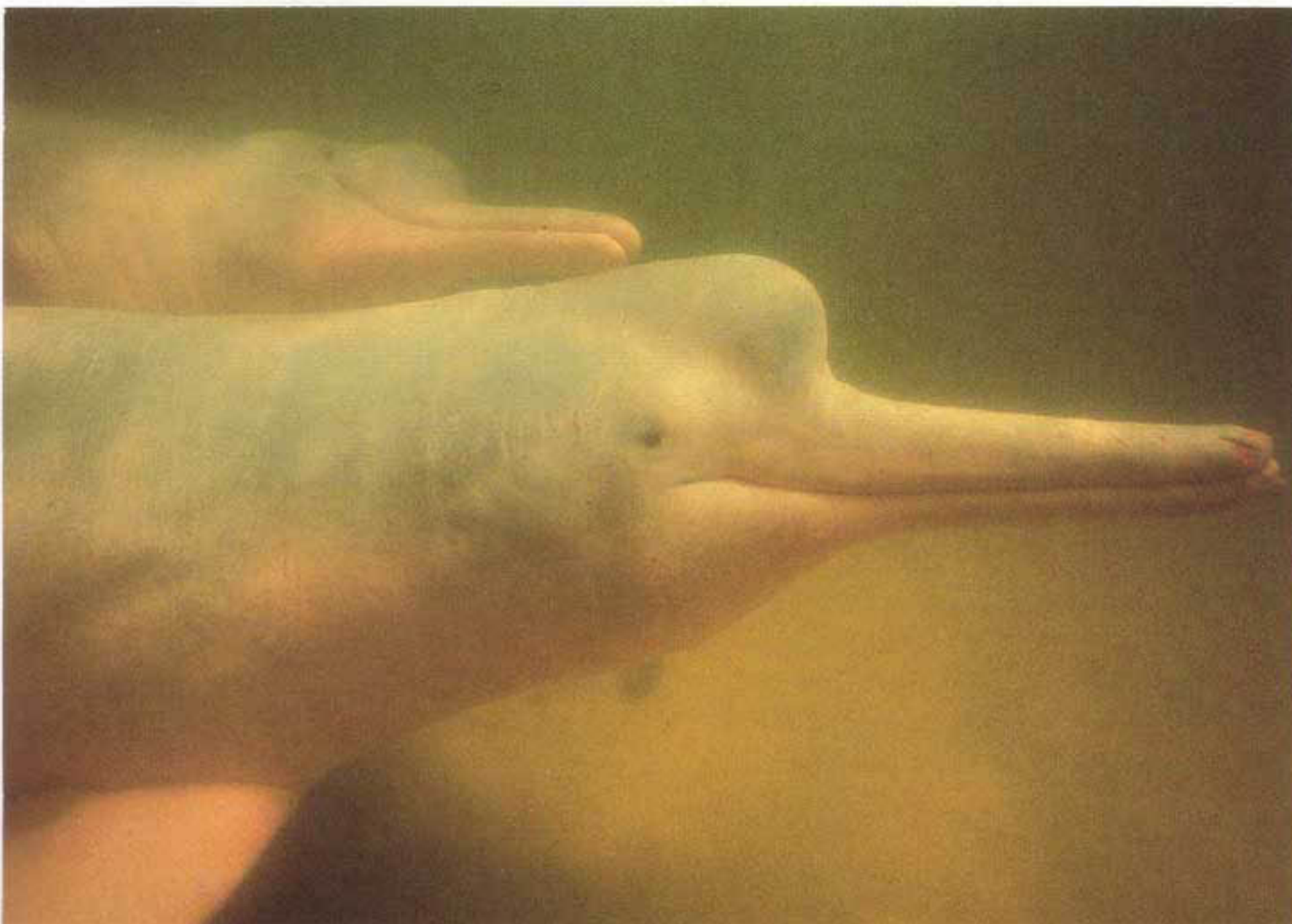
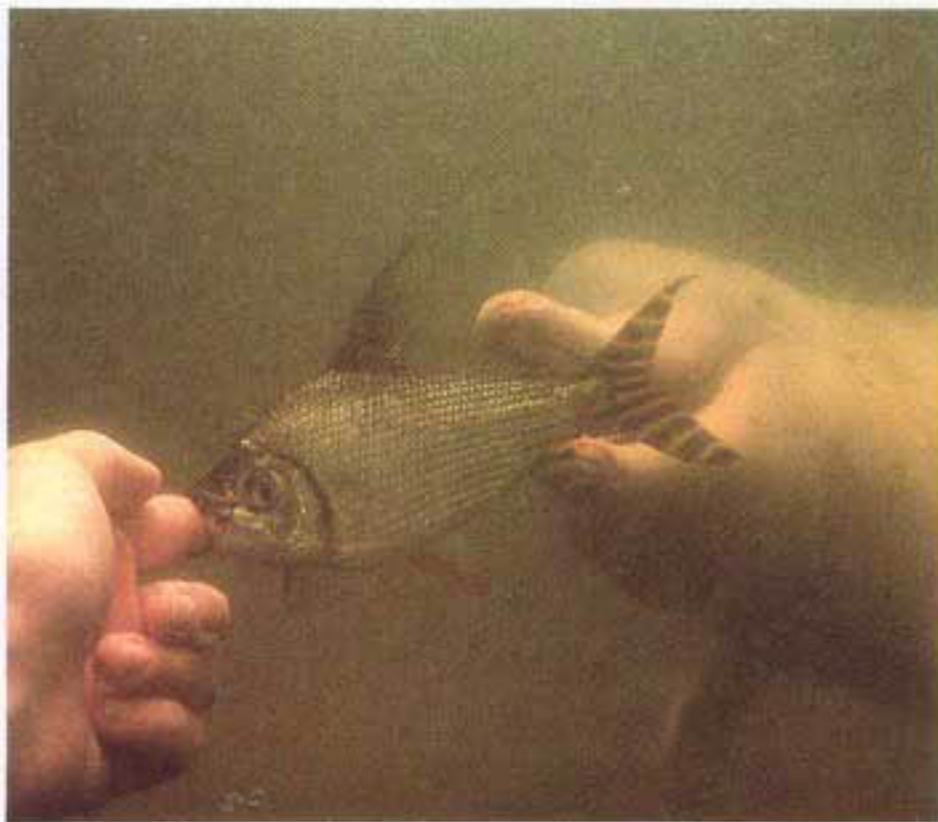


behind my back, or anywhere out of reach. She put her beak, or rostrum, against my chest, under my arm, or directly against my facemask. She finally gave up and went back to her normal routine of resting, rising for a breath, circling around me, and resting.

A little later, I tried to pet and scratch her, but as soon as I touched her, she returned to my hands for food. She found nothing and left. Once she approached me from behind and gave me

a solid bump with her snout. This scared the heck out of me and made me very jittery. She stopped about two feet in front of me. I swam up to her and, as soon as I was about to touch her flukes, she gave a powerful flip of her tail with such force that I felt as though I were going to somersault in the water. She obviously did not want to play and seemed to be frustrated by the lack of fish.

After two days of playing with my pink friend, we caught two more *Inia* dolphins. One of them swam back and forth very fast, vocalizing most of the time. It seemed that the only concern of the new dolphin was to escape. My *Inia* friend repeatedly grasped the flukes of the new dolphin in her mouth. I wondered if she were attacking the new dolphin, but if it were a real attack, there would have been more damage.



These playful bites did leave teeth marks on the flukes of the new dolphin, though. She also poked, rubbed, pushed, and tried to be as close to the new dolphin as possible. The "play" seemed rough and I realized how gentle *Inia* had been with me! Had she treated me in such a manner, I would surely have thought that I was being viciously attacked and would have felt lucky to have escaped with my life from such a horrible encounter!

When we finished our observation and studies of the dolphins, we released them, grateful for their visit. The new dolphin was the first to leave and, with some encouragement, my special friend swam away. I left this experience with a sense of wonder for this beautiful animal, temporarily held in captivity, who could treat its captors so gently. I appreciated its grace in the water and its ability to learn, and I respected its power in the water. As they swam away, I sniffed.

It's 11:30 p.m. now and I'm watching a grasshopper eat a piece of bread in the galley of *Calypso*. I miss you. See you soon.

Love,
Dad

Article and photos by Richard C. Murphy

The Ugly Dolphin???

Here are some facts about *Inia*, the pink river dolphin, that Vera Da Silva, a scientist who studies dolphins, shared with us.

Inia is one of the most ancient dolphins of the family *Platanistidae*. Their size ranges from four feet (1.2 meters) to one report of 9.8 feet (three meters). They are slow swimmers with large flippers and, unlike other dolphins, they can turn their heads sideways and up and down.

They have very strong teeth and jaws and eat crabs, turtles, and the tough armored catfish, spines and all. Most of the time they eat fish. *Inia* is one of the few dolphins that have cavities!

Mother *Inias* care for their babies for an entire year, teaching them to catch fish in the dry season, when the waters are low and fish are easy to catch, and in the wet season, when fish are scattered and are harder to find.

Some *Inia* are dark gray, some are light gray, and some are shades of pink. They are seen in small groups of two or three but also spend time alone. *Inia* is a curious dolphin and often approaches people. They sometimes swim upside down, and we don't know why. Many scientists believe that *Inia* is as intelligent as the bottlenose dolphin and the Orca, or killer whale.

With its large body, lumpy forehead, and long snout, *Inia* is known as the "ugly dolphin." Captain Cousteau observed, "It has a strange shape, this animal who is very ancient; in a photograph or a drawing, the first impression is of ugliness. But when you see it in its element, it is a completely different story; in motion its ugliness becomes rational and very beautiful."