

Expert Group Meeting on Marine Mammals in North-East Asia

Learning from the Yellow-Bohai Sea Spotted Seals Protected Areas Network Project

Linda Wong

huawang@pku.org.cn



01

Overview

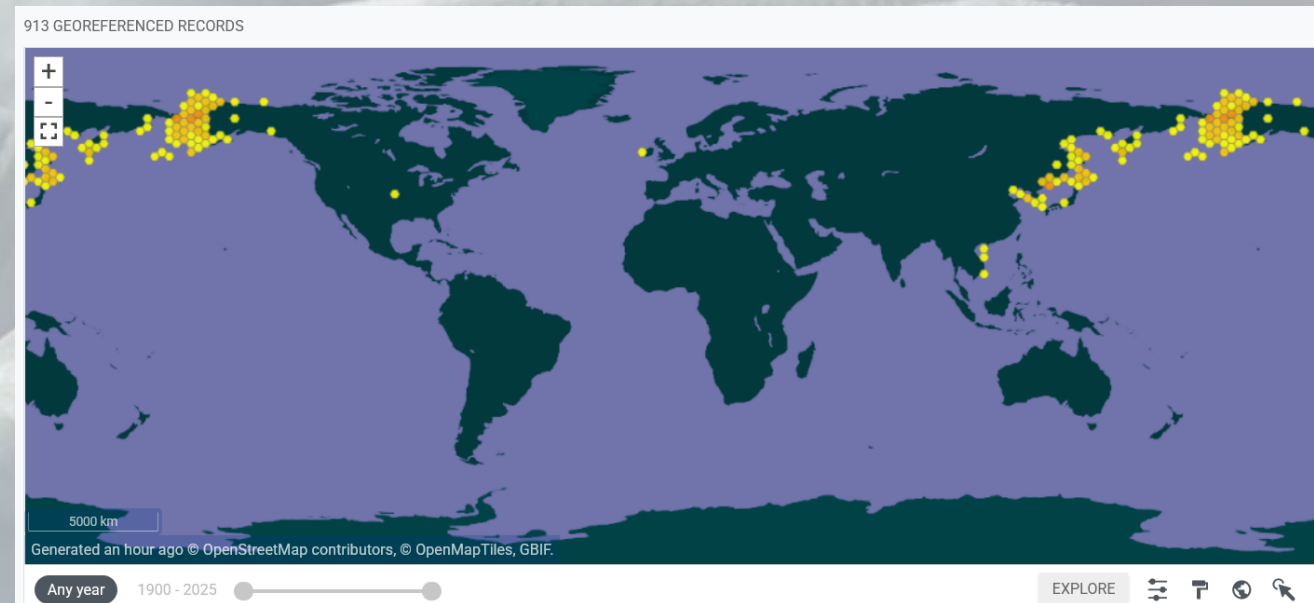




Spotted seals in Liaodongwan, photo by Peilie Wang & John Wong

Spotted Seal in Yellow–Bohai Sea

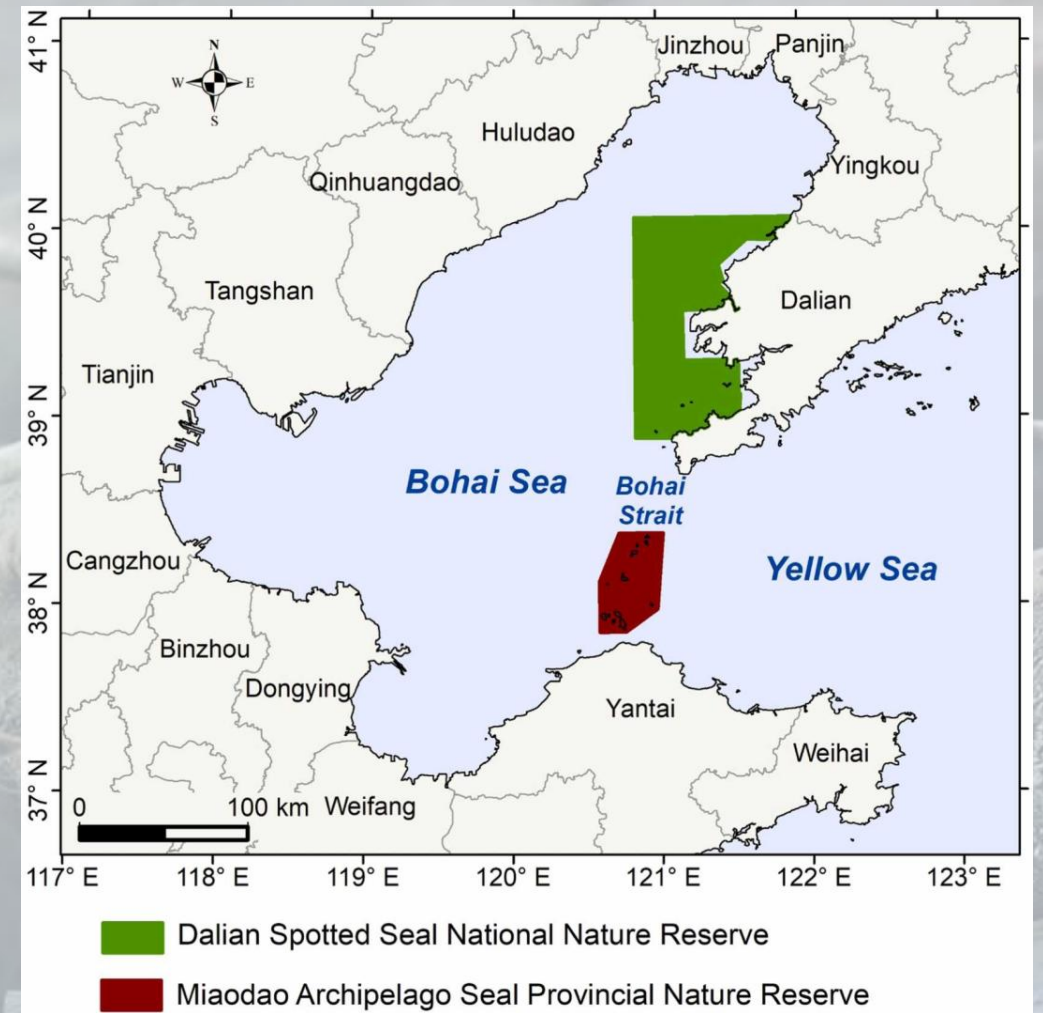
- Only pinniped breeding in China
- 1st class nationally protected species (2021-)
- Flagship for Yellow & Bohai Sea ecosystems
- Threats: habitat loss, poaching, climate change



Map Source: GBIF

Conservation Efforts

- Marine protected areas established
- Ministry of Agriculture launched the Spotted Seal Conservation Action Plan (2017-2026)



The map above shows the locations of two key spotted seal reserves in the Bohai and Yellow Seas: the Dalian National Nature Reserve and the Miaodao Archipelago Provincial Nature Reserve. (Source: Chen, R., Wu, X., & Xu, L. (2025))

Poaching Case of 100 Seal pups in Feb. 2019



- a major illegal poaching operation targeting spotted seal pups. 100 seal pups found. 71 alive, 29 dead.

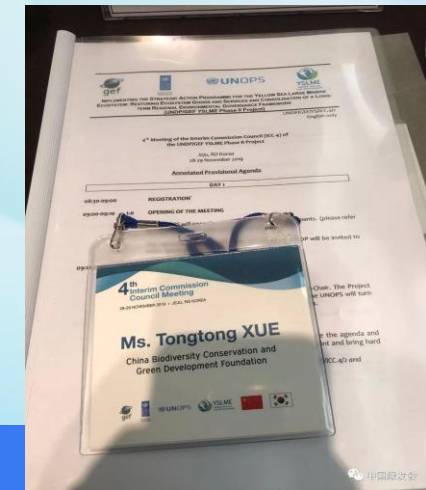
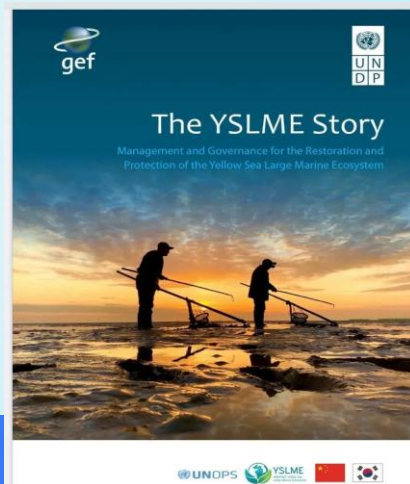


02

Background

Part of UNDP/GEF YSLME Phase II Project

- Timeline: Oct ~ Dec 2019
- Aim: Build a conservation network for spotted seals
- Activities in 20+ Community Conservation Areas (CCAfa)
- Focus on awareness, education, and citizen participation



About the project

Institutional Framework

The spotted seal protected areas network project was implemented as part of the **UNDP/GEF Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (YSLME)** Phase II Project, representing an international collaboration to address transboundary marine conservation challenges.

Implementation Timeline

The specific project activities were carried out between October and December 2019, following the public outcry from the February 2019 poaching incident, with rapid mobilization to address urgent conservation needs.

Strategic Objectives

The primary aim was to establish an effective protected area network for spotted seals through community engagement, while focusing on three core pillars: raising public awareness, delivering targeted education programs, and promoting citizen participation in monitoring and protection efforts.

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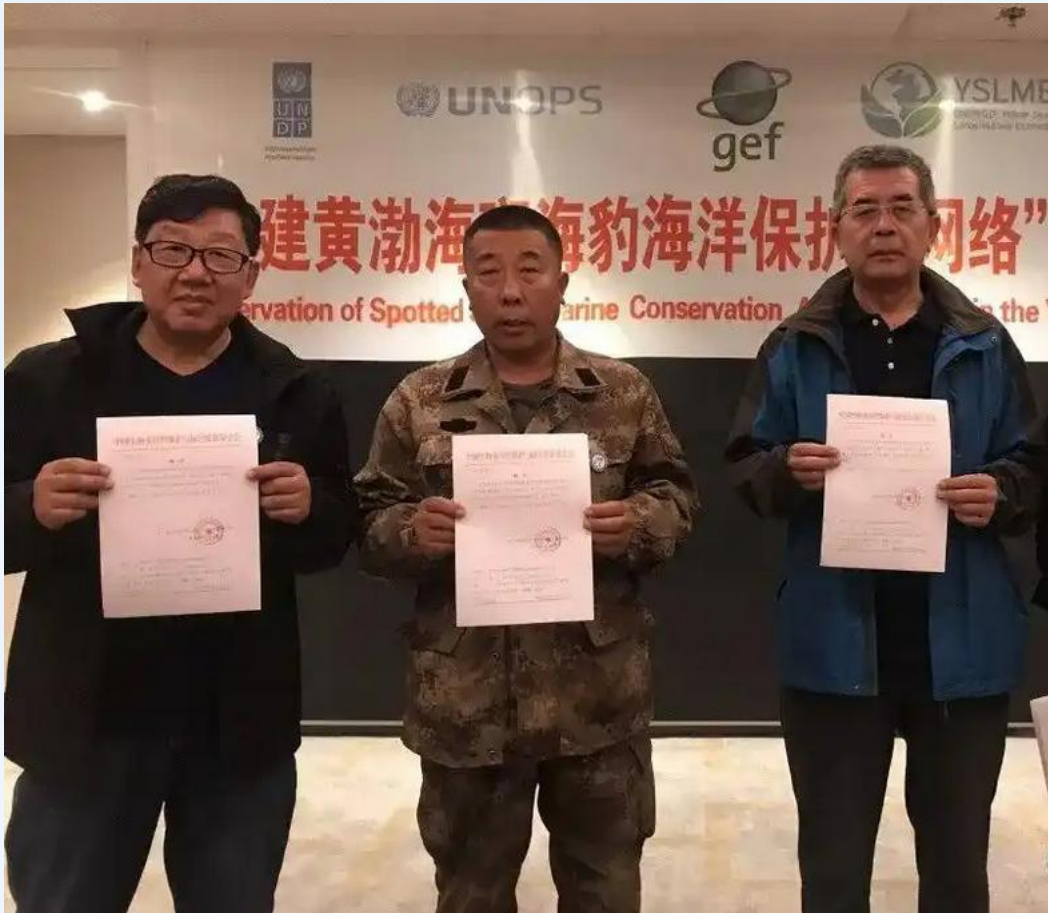
Activities

- **Education & Awareness promotion**
- **Biodiversity-mainstreaming Campaigns**
- **Science & Law Popularization**
- **Mobilising multi-stakeholders**

Case Study: Rescue of *Gousheng*



A network of coastal conservation areas and volunteers



15 schools, 2900 students/teachers



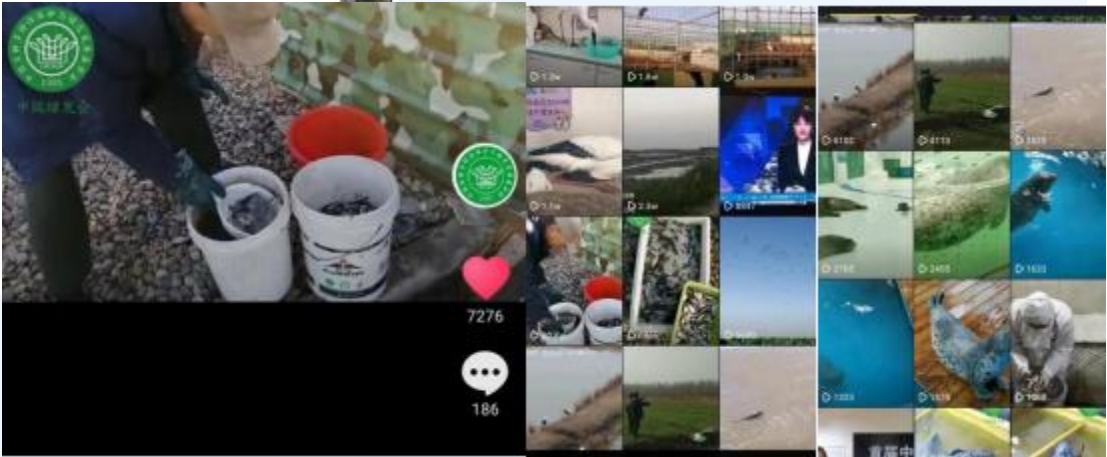
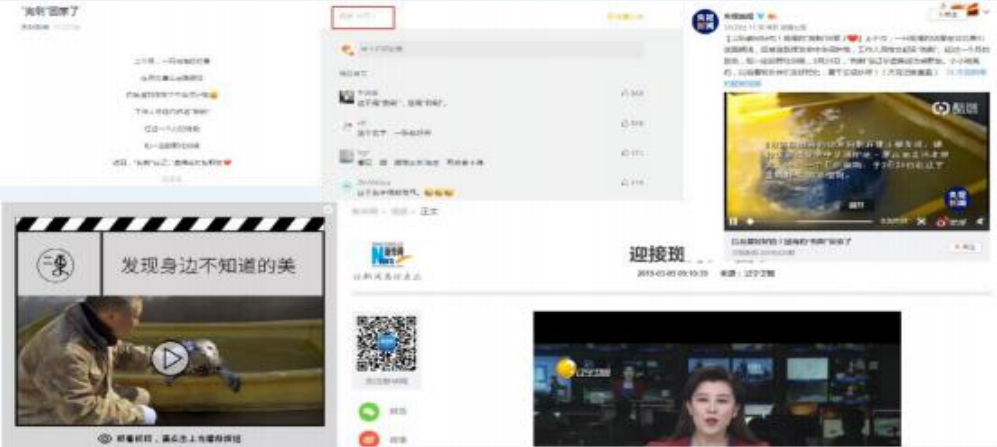
No.	Name of Activity	Time	Location	Number of Participants (Students, Faculties)
1	Protect Spotted Seal, Let's Act Together	Oct 14 th , 2019	Liaohu River Oil Field Bohai No.1 Elementary School	95
2	Endangered Species of Spotted Seal Popular Science Class	Oct 22 nd , 2019	Beijing Yucui School	50
3	Protect Spotted Seal, Let's Act Together	Oct 24 th , 2019	Binhai Elementary School	100
4	Popular Science Activity about Spotted Seal Conservation	Nov 3 rd , 2019	"CBCGDF's Green Great" in Inner Mongolia	40 (on the spot), 200 (remote volunteers)
5	Publicity Activities of Spotted Seal Science Popularization Center in CCAfa	Nov 13 th , 2019	Dalian Changxing Island Secondary Vocational and Technical School	400
6	Publicity Activities of Spotted Seal Science Popularization Center in CCAfa	Nov 13 th , 2019	Dalian Changxing Island High School	1,200
7	"Spotted Seal on the Broken Ice" Science Popular Activity	Nov 20 th , 2019	Hubei Oil Field Organ Primary School	50
8	"Be the Guardian of the Life on Earth • Spotted Seal on the Broken Ice" Science Popular Activity	Nov 22 nd , 2019	North China Oil Field Youjian Elementary School	70
9	Recognizing the Spotted Seal in Liaohokou	Nov 26 th , 2019	Golden Apple Kindergarten	40
10	Green Great • Guangdong Universities Public Welfare Organization Exchange Meeting	Nov 26 th , 2019	Guangzhou After Graduating from the Public Library	60 (volunteers)
11	Lecture on Protection Knowledge of Spotted Seal	Nov 29 th , 2019	Xianyuwan Central Primary School	300
12	"Spotted Seal on the Broken Ice" Science Popular Activity	Nov 29 th , 2019	Wafangdian Honghe Hope Primary School	200
13	Publicity Activities of Spotted Seal Science Popularization Center in CCAfa	Nov 29 th , 2019	Wafangdian Tuoshanxiang Elementary School	70
14	"Spotted Seal on the Broken Ice" Story-telling Activity	Dec 1 st , 2019	Renqiu Library	40 (Parents & Kids)
15	Youth Volunteer Class for Spotted Seal Conservation	Dec 3 rd , 2019	Xinglong Middle School	90
Total				2,900

15 schools, 2900 students/teachers



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Mainstreaming-biodiversity



4.3.2 全民救助：中华保护区，志愿者携手拯救失去的斑海豹	82
4.3.3 宣传普及：首次斑海的普法讲座走进长岛	84
4.3.4 科普教育：中华保护区斑海的科普中心系列讲座	85
4.3.5 宣传教育：中华保护区的保护区（营）以实现地斑海豹	87
4.3.6 宣传教育：中华保护区的保护区（营）以实现地斑海豹	88
4.4 牵手国际项目：国内为保护斑海豹	94
4.4.1 以中华保护区体系为基石，成功申请国际斑海豹生态系统管理项目	94
4.4.2 依托“构建黄渤海斑海豹海洋保护区网络”项目，实现斑海豹保护上全民参与	97
专题五 斑海豹保护志愿者行动纪实	100
5.1 破冰之旅：100只斑海的志愿者之旅	100
5.2 破冰之旅：100只斑海的志愿者之旅	104
5.3 破冰之旅：100只斑海的志愿者之旅	122
5.4 破冰之旅：100只斑海的志愿者之旅	124
5.5 破冰之旅：100只斑海的志愿者之旅	126
5.5.1 斑海豹的种群	126
5.5.2 一只斑海的斑海豹	128
5.5.3 斑海豹的种群	131
5.5.4 斑海豹的种群	135
5.5.5 斑海豹的种群	142
专题六 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	144
6.1 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	144
6.2 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	144
6.3 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	145
6.4 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	145
6.5 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	146
Appendix 1	148
1. Zhou Jiefang: Good Food Changes the Earth, Shows Climate Change and Biodiversity Crisis	148
2. Zhou Jiefang signs the Preamble for Global Deal for Nature (GDN): (GDN) will publish its	

目录	
专题一 保护珍稀的斑海豹	1
1.1 海豹的种类和分布	1
1.2 斑海豹的分布和生存现状	8
1.3 中国辽东半岛斑海的生存现状	10
1.4 斑海豹的分布和生存现状	12
专题二 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	15
2.1 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	15
2.2 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	20
2.3 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	24
2.4 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	31
2.5 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	33
2.6 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	36
2.7 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	39
2.8 斑海豹的种群与救助纪实	40
专题三 气候变化对斑海豹的影响	42
3.1 气候变化对斑海豹的影响	42
3.2 气候变化对斑海豹的影响	46
3.3 气候变化对斑海豹的影响	48
3.4 气候变化对斑海豹的影响	52
3.5 气候变化对斑海豹的影响	55
3.6 气候变化对斑海豹的影响	58
专题四 中华保护区体系	66
4.1 中华保护区体系	66
4.2 中华保护区体系	76
4.3 中华保护区体系	80
4.3.1 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.2 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.3 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.4 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.5 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.6 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.7 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.8 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.9 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.10 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.11 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.12 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.13 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.14 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.15 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.16 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.17 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.18 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.19 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.20 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.21 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.22 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.23 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.24 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.25 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.26 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.27 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.28 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.29 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.30 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.31 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.32 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.33 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.34 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.35 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.36 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.37 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.38 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.39 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.40 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.41 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.42 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.43 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.44 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.45 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.46 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.47 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.48 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.49 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.50 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.51 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.52 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.53 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.54 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.55 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.56 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.57 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.58 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.59 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.60 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.61 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.62 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.63 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.64 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.65 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.66 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.67 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.68 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.69 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.70 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.71 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.72 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.73 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.74 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.75 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.76 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.77 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.78 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.79 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.80 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.81 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.82 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.83 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.84 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.85 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.86 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.87 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.88 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.89 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.90 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.91 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.92 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.93 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.94 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.95 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.96 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.97 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.98 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.99 斑海豹的保护区	80
4.3.100 斑海豹的保护区	80
附录 1	175
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awareness & education: materials



小豹豹侧面 ▼

斑海豹小挂件

侧面 正面

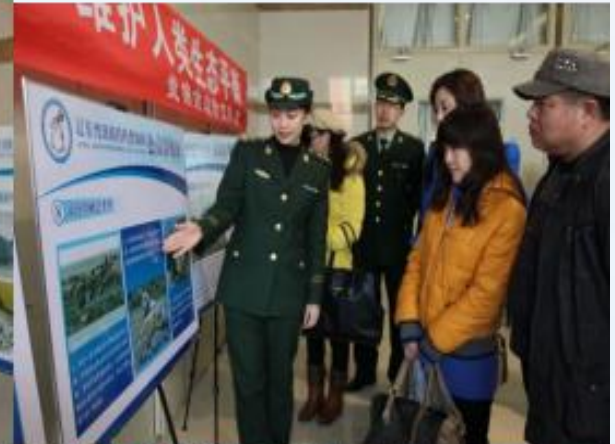
【斑海豹萌宠设计理念】

斑海豹圆滚滚，毛茸茸的身体是它可爱的地方，身上长有斑纹是它的特征，就叫它“小豹豹”。

所以从特征出发，把它设计成圆圆的可爱的玩具，加上一对坚定的小眼神，寓意它对绿会斑海豹保护志愿者们日常巡护、救助活动的感激之心与坚定的信任。

gef UNOPS YSLME

awareness & education: materials



Villagers and fishermen



Apart from field visiting fishermen and villiges,

We also organized a multi-stakeholder meeting with local authorities, volunteers, and especially fishermen, to discuss challenges in spotted seal conservation, raise legal and ecological awareness, and encourage sustainable livelihoods beyond poaching.



Some other efforts

- Organized workshops with legal and ecological experts and proposed legislative recommendations.
- Drafted a proposal to upgrade the spotted seal to National First-Class Protected Species; supported by lawmakers and submitted as a formal motion to Two Sessions.
- Conducted synchronized population surveys of spotted seals for two consecutive years (March 2019 and 2020), based on conservation areas and volunteer networks.

04

Deliverables in numbers

- Book: “Spotted Seal on the Broken Ice” (3,000 copies)
- New Media: WeChat, Weibo, TikTok (140,000+ reach; millions of views)
- Science Popularization: 15 activities in 6 cities, ~3,000 participants
- Promotional Items: toys, calendars, bookmarks, badges, books

05

Conclusion



Lessons Learned



Community Engagement

Local community engagement has proven to be a critical factor in reducing poaching risks, as residents who are invested in conservation become active participants in protection efforts rather than passive observers.



Diverse Participation Approaches

Maintaining a diverse portfolio of engagement approaches has been essential for sustaining high levels of participation, as different community segments respond to different types of activities and incentives.



Multi-Channel Communication Strategy

The project demonstrated that combining online digital outreach with offline community activities significantly amplifies conservation impact by creating multiple touchpoints for engagement and reinforcing key messages across different platforms.



Capacity Building Needs

A key identified need is the development of more comprehensive professional training programs for community leaders to enhance their ability to coordinate local conservation activities and effectively communicate with various stakeholders.

Lessons Learned



Importance of law enforcement

In 2022, The case of Zhai and ten others for the illegal purchase, transport, and sale of spotted seals—tried by the Changxing Island Court (first instance) and Dalian Intermediate Court (second instance)—was selected by the Supreme People's Court as a landmark case in China's Judicial Protection of Biodiversity. The ruling emphasized the harsh penalties imposed for trafficking a nationally protected species, rescuing nearly 100 spotted seal pups, and safeguarding this unique marine mammal population.



Biodiversity finance

This case highlights the importance of biodiversity finance. Support from the UN and GEF funding played a key role through the YSLME Yellow–Bohai Sea Spotted Seals Protected Areas Network Project.

Conclusion

- **Community participation**
- **Public awareness**
- **Cross-sector cooperation & ecological connectivity**
- **Importance of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) & people's engagement**



THE END

Acknowledgements

Thanks to: UNDP, GEF, UNOPS, YSLME Project Office, local authorities, lawmakers,
Local communities, volunteers, schools, media, etc.