

## **Marine Animals in the Area 1: East Asian Finless Porpoise (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis sunameri*)**

Two local legends in Naruto likely arose from sightings of the East Asian finless porpoise: One telling of the shaved heads of Buddhist monks bobbing along on the surface of the Seto Inland Sea, and the other an account of visitations by “mermaids.” Finless porpoises are usually between 1.2 and 1.9 meters long and weigh 30 to 45 kilograms, ranging from grayish white to cream in color. In place of the dorsal fin common to most aquatic mammals, they possess a keel that stretches from the chest area to the root of its tail. They have a rounded head, without a snout—which would account for the “sea monk” myth—and teeth shaped like the trump spade in a pack of cards that allow them to feed on both crustaceans and small fish.

The finless porpoise was previously assumed to comprise just a single species. More recently, though, marine biologists have recognized two distinct species. The first, *Neophocaena asiaeorientalis*—known as *sunameri* in Japanese—inhabits the seas north of Taiwan, across the Korean Peninsula, and reaching Japan. The second, *Neophocaena phocaenoides*, is found in waters from the Persian Gulf to Taiwan. Both are classified as vulnerable, with the *sunameri* population in the Seto Inland Sea estimated at 7,600 to 9,200.