



THE FRESHWATER "BAIJI" DOLPHIN in China's Yangtze River is believed to be near extinction. KYODO PHOTO

'Baiji' dolphin said to number under 150

The number of rare freshwater dolphins in China's Yangtze River has dropped dramatically in recent years to less than 150, a Chinese expert said.

Professor Zhou Kaiya of Nanjing Teachers University said during a visit to Japan that the number of "baiji" dolphins, the most threatened of the world's five freshwater

dolphin species, has been halved from about 300 in 1990.

A team of researchers from the university surveyed the dolphins over a 500 km stretch of the river between 1989 and 1992 with the cooperation of the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Chinese government, Zhou said.

They found only 30 in the area.

Taking the number in other

areas into account, they estimated the total at about 100, or 150 at most.

The baiji has a pointed beaklike snout resembling the earliest known types of dolphins.

About 1,000 were known to exist 30 years ago, but numbers have fallen off because of river pollution and injuries from boat propellers.