



Thailand is situated in the tropical region of Southeast Asia just north of the equator from N5° 37' to 20° 30' and from E97° 20' to 105° 39'. The country occupies an area of 513,115 km² with about 25% tropical forests and 2,600 km of coastline. This area includes the Gulf of Thailand facing the South China Sea in the east and the Andaman Sea in the west covering a total area of 420,000 km²

which is rich in marine biodiversity and encompasses a highly productive fishery. Thailand is also well known for its natural wealth of white sandy beaches, beautiful coral reefs and rocky mountains all of which have become popular tourist attractions.

In the past decades, deforestation and environmental problems have led to tremendous loss of biodiversity and ecosystems. Nevertheless, Thailand still retains substantial bioresources and natural beauty to be enjoyed by casual visitors and naturalists as well as by professional biologists. Such is the case at Khanom – Mu Koh Thale Tai (or South Sea Islands) including Samui Island in the Gulf of Thailand. This area has beautiful scenery with natural treasures including some of the world's most famous beaches and diving sites, and marvelous caves as well as a cultural diversity in folklore, making the South Sea Islands one of the most popular destinations for tourists.



Figure 10. A pink dolphin leaping from the surface of the water. (Photo: 25 July 2008)



Figure 11. A sandy seabed with patches of green seagrass. This seabed is a major breeding site for the pink dolphin (Watanabe et al. 2008). (Photo: 25 July 2008)