

Dolphins

www.OceanCrusaders.org



www.DolphinProject.org



Introduction

Dolphins are marine mammals that are closely related to whales and porpoises.

There are approximately 40 species of dolphins ranging in size from 1.2m and 40kg up to 9.5m and 10 tonnes. That's a big dolphin isn't it?

Well, did you know that the ORCA (or killer whale) is actually a dolphin?



Dolphins are seen by humans as playful and intelligent and hence they have become very popular in our culture. They are often found riding the bows of boats all over the world as they enjoy the pressure wave formed by the boats bow.



Distribution and abundance

Dolphins are found all over the world, however they usually stick to shallower waters of the continental shelves.

The killer whale occurs in all waters though it is most abundant in the southern oceans. The other wide ranging species, the bottlenose dolphin, occurs in all but the colder waters.



Adaptations for life in the sea

Bottlenose dolphins have the general body form of toothed whales: a streamlined body, paired pectoral fins, and in most species a single dorsal fin.

Movement through the water is by up and down movements of the horizontally flattened tail fin. The skin contains a complex system of nerve endings that helps dolphins swim more efficiently. At high speeds they need to ensure a smooth flow of water over their body.

In some species, sustained speed is important in the pursuit of fast prey near the surface. In others, speed may be essential to enable the longest possible hunting time at the required depth, and to avoid predators.



The skin on the lower jaw is highly sensitive and is used to investigate small objects in the same way that people use their hands. Taste buds are present on the tongue but the sense of smell is believed to be poorly developed in most species.

The blowhole on top of the head enables air to be taken in rapidly when they surface, some species taking only one fifth of a second to exhale and fill their lungs.



Sight & Sound

Sight in dolphins appears to be well developed. Fine detail is discerned both above and below the water. Although the bottlenose and common dolphins have binocular vision they often use only one eye to examine objects.

The external ear openings of toothed dolphins are small, only two to three millimetres in diameter in the bottlenose dolphin. Although they can hear well in air, hearing underwater is mainly by the conduction of sound through bones in the skull and lower jaw.



Most Common types of Dolphins

- Common Dolphin



- Bottlenose Dolphin



- Spinner Dolphin



Social behaviour

Dolphins are social, living in pods of up to a dozen individuals. In places with a high abundance of food, pods can merge temporarily, forming a super-pod; such groupings may exceed 1,000 dolphins. Individuals communicate using a variety of clicks, whistles and other vocalizations. They make ultrasonic sounds to help them locate each other.



Feeding

Various methods of feeding exist among and within species, some apparently exclusive to a single population. Fish and squid are the main food, but the false killer whale and the orca also feed on other marine mammals.

One common feeding method is herding, where a pod squeezes a school of fish into a small volume, known as a bait ball. Individual members then take turns ploughing through the ball, feeding on the stunned fish.



Jumping and playing

Dolphins occasionally leap above the water surface, and sometimes perform acrobatic tricks. Scientists are not certain about the purpose of the acrobatics. Possibilities include locating schools of fish by looking at above-water signs like feeding birds, communicating with other dolphins, dislodging parasites or simple amusement.



Sleeping

Generally, dolphins sleep with only one side of the brain in what is known as a slow-wave sleep, thus maintaining enough consciousness to breathe and to watch for possible predators and other threats.



Natural threats

Except for humans, dolphins have few natural enemies. Some species or specific populations have none, making them apex predators (top of their food chain).

For most of the smaller species of dolphins, only a few of the larger sharks, such as the bull shark, tiger shark and great white shark are a potential risk, especially for calves.

Some of the larger dolphin species, especially orcas (killer whales), may also prey on smaller dolphins, but this seems rare.

Dolphins also suffer from a wide variety of diseases and parasites.



The Human Threat

Believe it or not, the biggest threat to Dolphins is from Humans.

Pesticides, heavy metals, plastics, and other industrial and agricultural pollutants that do not disintegrate rapidly in the environment concentrate in predators such as dolphins. Injuries or deaths due to collisions with boats, especially their propellers, are also common.



The Human Threat

Various fishing methods, most notably purse seine fishing (2 boats hauling nets between them) for tuna and the use of drift nets, unintentionally kill many dolphins as they get caught up in their nets.

Also shark nets at beaches have claimed the lives of many dolphins as they get caught in the netting and can't escape.



Even though dolphins are adored by billions, there are some countries that hunt them as a source of food. Little do they know that dolphins contain dangerous levels of mercury that can actually poison them.

However each year approximately 25,000 dolphins are slaughtered in what is known as 'Drive Hunts' This is where boats, using banging noises and nets, drive the dolphins into a cove or harbour where they are slaughtered. This mainly happens in Japan.

So if the meat is poisonous and they are loved so much, why does this happen still?



For your enjoyment is the simple answer.

Unfortunately the same people who kill dolphins also provide dolphins to marine parks that have dolphins shows. Dolphins are valuable assets and trainers pay up to \$150,000 for a dolphin and this money funds the slaughter.

Whilst some dolphins are chosen the rest are slaughtered. Those chosen to perform for you, live a life of pain as dolphins in the ocean swim up to 40kms a day. In a small pool they can't swim that far and they end up stressed out as the very noises they use for navigation reflect back. This adds to the noise of filters and pumps.

They may look happy but they aren't. To help them get through their stresses they are heavily drugged.

It really isn't natural and unfortunately hundreds of dolphins die in captivity every year.



What can we do?

There are four main things that you can do in your every day life to help dolphins.

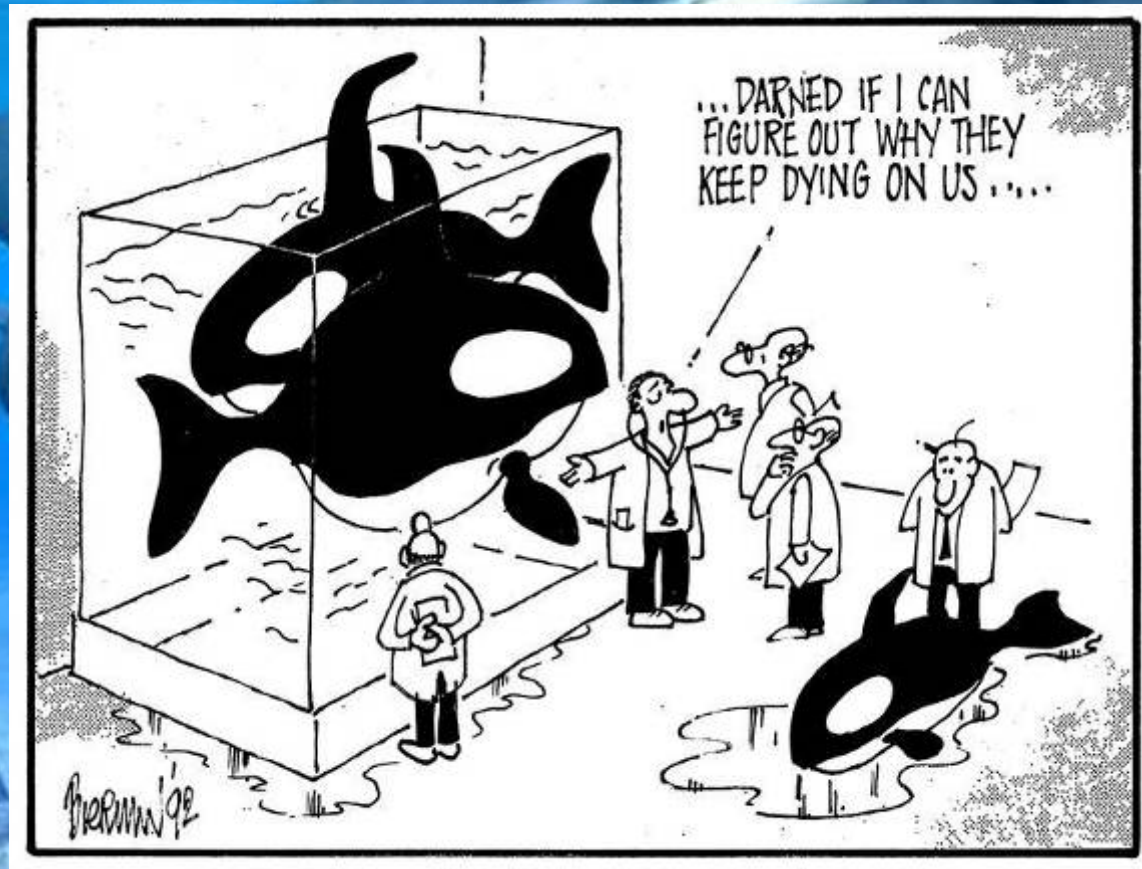
1. Don't use pesticides and bleaches that pollute the waters that dolphins live in. Every time you use a shampoo or cleaning agent that isn't bio-degradable you are hurting our oceans.
2. Don't use plastic bags and plastics. They end up in the ocean where dolphins can accidentally eat them and they may choke and die.
3. Buy only dolphin friendly Tuna and fish. Dolphin safe labels attempt to reassure consumers fish and other marine products have been caught in a dolphin-friendly way.



Most importantly, please don't visit any park to see dolphins perform tricks. The best place to see dolphins are in the wild where they will ride the bows of boats.

Places like SeaWorld may seem like a lot of fun but they are funding the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of dolphins and this is not very nice.

Would you prefer to see dolphins like this



Or like this?



Like this?



This is a picture of Ric O'Barry who is trying to free all captive dolphins and stop the dolphin slaughters. His website is www.dolphinproject.org

He's holding dolphin meat packaged up for a supermarket in Japan!!!

Or like this?





Thanks for helping keep us safe.
When you come out on your boat,
We'll come and play with you!!