

Three Articles about Dolphins



All About Dolphins

1. Dolphins are some of the most playful and intelligent animals on our planet. Even though dolphins spend their lives in the water, they are not fish, but are mammals. Dolphins can't breathe water like fish, but need to come to the surface to breathe air. There are many kinds of dolphins. Perhaps the most famous are the Bottlenose Dolphin and the Killer Whale (that's right the Orca, or Killer Whale, is a member of the dolphin family).
2. Dolphins are very social animals. Many dolphins travel in groups called pods. Some dolphins, like Killer Whales, live in pods of 5-30 members for their entire lives. Each pod behaves differently. Some pods migrate and travel around the world, while others have a specific territory. Sometimes pods can group together to make giant pods as large as 1000 or more dolphins. Baby dolphins are called calves. The males are called bulls and the females are called cows.
3. The largest dolphin is the Killer Whale which grows up to 23 feet long and can weight over 4 tons. The smallest dolphin is the Heaviside's Dolphin which grows to just over 3 feet long and weighs around 90 pounds. Dolphins have long snouts that typically hold around 100 teeth. They also have a blowhole on the top of their head that they use for breathing.
4. For the most part, dolphins eat other smaller fish, but they are not limited to just fish. They eat squid, too, and some dolphins, like Killer Whales, will often eat small sea mammals like seals and penguins. Dolphins often hunt together, herding fish into packed groups or into inlets where they can be easily caught. Some dolphins will share their food with the young or let the young catch injured prey as practice. They don't chew their food, they swallow it whole. Dolphins get the water they need from the animals they eat, rather than drinking ocean water.
5. Dolphins communicate through chirps and whistles. Not a lot is known about their communication. They like to jump and play and do acrobatic spins in the air. They have been known to surf waves near the beach or follow the wake of ships. Dolphins are also very trainable as shown by the shows they put on at ocean parks like Sea World.
6. Dolphins have excellent eyesight and hearing. Underwater they use echolocation. Echolocation is kind of like sonar where dolphins make a sound and then listen to the echo. Their hearing is so sensitive to these echoes that they can almost "see" objects in the water by hearing. This allows dolphins to locate food in cloudy or dark water.

7. Dolphins have to sleep, so how do they do this without drowning? Dolphins let half of their brain sleep at a time. While one half sleeps the other half is enough awake to keep the dolphin from drowning. Dolphins may float at the surface while sleeping or swim slowly to the surface every now and then for a breath.
8. Dolphins are highly intelligent marine mammals and are part of the family of toothed whales that includes orcas and pilot whales. They are found worldwide, mostly in shallow seas of the continental shelves, and are carnivores, mostly eating fish and squid. Dolphin coloration varies, but they are generally gray in color with darker backs than the rest of their bodies.

Bottlenose Dolphins

Bottlenose dolphins are amazing communicators. They send messages to one another in different ways. They squeak and whistle and use body language—leaping as high as 20 feet (6 meters) in the air, snapping their jaws, slapping their tails on the surface of the water, and even butting heads.

These dolphins also produce high frequency clicks, which act as a sonar system called echolocation (ek-oh-low-KAY-shun). When the clicking sounds hit an object in the water, like a fish or rock, they bounce off and come back to the dolphin as echoes.

Echolocation tells the dolphins the shape, size, speed, distance, and location of the object.

Bottlenose dolphins also have a sharp sense of hearing. Scientists believe that the sounds travel through the dolphin's lower jaw to its inner ear and then are transmitted to the brain for analysis.

Threats and Dangers to Dolphin Survival

Wild dolphins face many natural dangers within the deep expanse of the ocean, however the most overwhelming threat to their existence is man.

Although some dolphin species are considered an endangered species, alarming statistics suggest that more and more dolphins are being killed by illegal dynamite fishing, being caught in fishing nets, collisions with boats and or propellers, marine pollution, disease and beaching due to sonar interference than ever before.

Research suggests that over 95% of dolphin deaths are directly attributable to man-related causes.

Some of the dolphin threats related to man are:

- Increasing Captivity
- The capture and holding of dolphins in research and aquariums is contributing to their deaths at an alarming rate.
- Researchers suggest that the capture process itself is resulting in an increased number of deaths among dolphins.
- The capture procedures, the transportation of the captured dolphins, the exposure to disease in captivity, are only some of the threats that dolphins face when they are taken from their natural environment.
- The increased popularity of swimming with dolphins programs have brought more and more dolphins into danger as their feeding and breeding areas are being invaded by tourists.