

Dolphins



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Dolphins Introduction Dolphins are part of toothed whales' family that includes pilot whales and orcas. They belong to the sub-order odontocetes of the order cetacea and are classified under the biggest and the most diverse family of this order – the family Delphinidae, which comprises more than thirty existing species (Dolphins. org, 3). They are commonly called small cetaceans as a group, although some of them are fairly big, reaching lengths of 20 feet and above. Dolphins are usually gray in color and their backs are darker than other parts of their bodies. They have a distinctive beak and their teeth have the shape of a cone. Generally, male dolphins are bigger than the females. Dolphins live worldwide in almost all major seas (mostly shallow seas of the continental shelves) and oceans, and some large river systems. Nevertheless, their circulation is not random – each species of dolphin has become specialized to thrive in a specific niche, and each species of dolphin has a special role in the niche (Earthtrust. org, 1-4, & Defenders. org, 1).

All dolphins are carnivores and while some feed exclusively on cephalopods or fish, the diet of others is more varied and it includes lobsters, fish, crabs, squid, and shrimps. Even though dolphins are said to possess pretty good eyesight, their murky/dark environment usually reduce their visibility. They therefore largely rely on their hearing sense to comprehend the world around them and to look for prey (Earthtrust. org, 12).

They have a large brain (almost the humans' size) that possesses a remarkable capability of learning and mimicking behaviors (Earthtrust. org, 9). Defenders. org records the fact that dolphins famous for their dexterity and mischievous character, which makes them wildlife watchers to love them. They can be seen leaping out of water, spy-hop/rise out of the water

vertically to see their surroundings and trail ships, mostly synchronize their progress with each other. Dolphins are believed to preserve energy through bow-riding (swimming beside ships).

Naturally, dolphins are very social animals and they mostly rely on social interaction during reproduction, defense and while hunting. They hunt for prey using echolocation and by surrounding a school of fish, swimming through the school and catching their prey in turns. They have a tendency of forming long-lasting groups, which vary in size from a small number of animals (2-40) known as pods, to bigger groups called herds or schools comprising of hundreds of dolphins. These groups may comprise several species, each occupying a different niche. Dolphins also go after other whales, fishing boats as well as seabirds to feed on the fish they discard or scare up (Defenders. org, 6 & Earthtrust. org, 15).

According to Dolphins. org, many groups of dolphins seem to have strict power hierarchies within each pod, with a few of them being dominant. They may express dominance by such behaviors as tail slapping, teeth raking, ramming, biting, or jaw popping. The feeding order of dolphins, their subgroup formation within the pod, or positioning may also express status. In most cases, large dolphin groups are mixed in terms of sex and age, while smaller groups can be nuclear (comprising of a single adult female and male; a bachelor group (comprising of younger and adult males); or a nursery group (comprising of several females and young). All groups of dolphins, in spite of their type, appear to have strong skills in team work and in cooperation while hunting, mating and looking after their young ones (26).

Conclusion

Apparently, dolphins are among marine world's most iconic species. Among

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other traits, their popularity and playful nature has always captivated the hearts of individuals worldwide. Regrettably, through fishing activities, people have depleted some dolphin species to the point of extinction. As Dolphin.org records, this is especially so in the Eastern Tropical Pacific as well as in the Black Sea, off the coast of West Africa. There is therefore dire need for governments to renew their commitment to save these and other endangered species and to enact and/or strengthen the Endangered Species Act in order to protect them.

Works Cited

Defenders.org. Dolphin. 2012. Web.

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