



All About Dolphins

FAQ

How can the known number of dolphin species change?

The ocean is huge and vast. There may be species that live far offshore and are rarely, if ever, seen by humans. There are large areas of the ocean that haven't been explored yet.

Why isn't the killer whale called the killer dolphin since it is classified as a dolphin?

The name was first "whale killer" since pods of killer whales were observed hunting and killing baleen whale calves. The name was later turned around to "killer whale". Many people prefer to call them "orcas" as it is felt that "killer" whale makes them sound bad, however "orca" is taken from their scientific name, *Orcinus orca* which came from the mythical Roman god, Orcus, who was believed to be the god of death and the underworld. In North American, the native Haida people refer to them as "skana" which means killer demon. So, perhaps, "killer whale" isn't such a bad name.

Why don't all dolphins have elongated "beaks"?

Depending on the depth of the dive needed to search for the main food source, a blunt nose and rounded head can be more of an advantage. Deeper diving cetaceans tend to have rounded heads without a prominent beak to help their brains compensate for the higher water pressure of deep water. For example, the beaked bottlenose dolphins normally dive about 10-150 feet in search of food while the round headed with no prominent beak pilot whales (which are dolphins) can dive at least 2,000 feet.

Why do dolphins always smile?

The facial expression of dolphins is based on their facial muscle anatomy. They lack the facial muscles needed to change their facial expressions, they cannot move their mouths in any other way. Many people mistakenly believe that dolphins are always "happy" because they interpret their facial expressions as a smile but the truth is that dolphins are not "smiling", that is their only possible facial expression. This "smile" leads many people to believe that captive dolphins are "happy" but indications that captive dolphins are not "happy" include repetitive stress behaviors and premature death.

How do newborn dolphins not drown when they are born since they need to breathe air?

Immediately after birth, the mother dolphin assists the newborn calf to the surface of the water where instinct takes over and the calf begins to breathe. Newborn calves quickly learn to time their breathing with their swimming pattern. The blowhole is opened when it is above water and quickly slammed shut with strong muscles before the dolphin descends back into the water.

How do scientists measure animal intelligence?

The measuring of animal intelligence is controversial and constantly evolving. Currently, the mirror self-awareness test is one of the most important tests used which not only shows which species have self-awareness but at what age it is acquired. Here is a link to a video that explains the mirror test: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VR4-fvjyMtY>

Other measurements used are the ability to communicate, cooperation between individuals, remembering events and learning concepts, changing behavior as a result of previous experiences, raising and passing information to offspring, understanding sign language and syntax (word) order as well as having a high encephalization quotient, which is a measurement of brain size compared to the average of their body size.

Why do we think dolphins are smart?

Based on observations in the wild as well as research done with captive dolphins, dolphins pass many of the tests that scientists use to measure intelligence. Dolphins also exhibit many behaviors that scientists associate with intelligence.

Here is a link to a video that explains this in more detail:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05PpTqtGhGU>