

Dolphin



Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) Photo: NOAA



Photo: NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center



Dolphin elongated beak



Dolphin curved fin



Porpoise Dolphin

Teeth

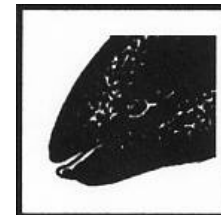
Porpoise



Harbor Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) Photo: NOAA



Harbor Porpoise Photo: Per Berggren/NOAA



Porpoise blunt snout



Porpoise triangular fin

Dolphin vs. Porpoise

*Dolphin and Porpoise are small toothed whales and belong to the dolphin family which are marine mammals. The largest member of the dolphin family is an orca or killer whale. The Gulf of Mexico and surrounding waters are home to a variety of Dolphin species, but we do not have Porpoise in our waters.

*Physically, dolphins and porpoises look different. In contrast to dolphins, porpoises are usually smaller and their length hardly exceeds 7 feet. But it is very common for dolphins to be over 10 feet long. Dolphins have a lean, sleek body, porpoises often are plumper. The teeth of the porpoise are spade-shaped, while the teeth of the dolphin are cone shaped. Dolphins have beaks and porpoises do not. Porpoises usually have a dorsal fin shaped like a triangle, dolphins have a hooked or curved dorsal fin. Comparing to porpoises, dolphins also have a longer lifespan than porpoises who normally live less than 15 years while they can live more than fifty years. Porpoises are very shy creatures while dolphins are extremely friendly with people.

*The Bottlenose Dolphin is the most common in our back bay waters here in Alabama. They are 8-12 feet long and weigh between 400 and 600 pounds.

*Female dolphins become sexually mature between the ages of 5 and 12. Males mature when they are 10 to 12 years old. Females can bear calves every two to three years. The gestation period is 12 months. Calves are born in water and will nurse for up to 18 months. Dolphins generally live between 30 and 50 years.

*Dolphins eat a wide variety of fish, squid and crustaceans, such as shrimp. Feeding generally peaks in the early morning and late afternoon; they do not chew their food but swallow it head first so that the fins do not get stuck in their throats.

*The marine mammals must come to the surface to breathe through the blowhole on the tops of their heads. They have to be conscious to breathe, so they sleep by resting one half of their brains at a time. While they are sleeping, they move very slowly, sometimes at the surface of the water, which is called logging. They sleep for about eight hours a day.

*Dolphins navigate and find food through echolocation. They send sound waves and interpret the echoes to locate objects and prey. They have a well-developed sense of hearing, and a well-developed sense of sight.

*Viewing Dolphins in their natural habitat can be a thrilling experience. However, when we approach wild dolphins too closely, move too quickly, or make too much noise, we increase the risk of disturbing their natural behaviors, such as migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding and sheltering.

***How you can help keep our environment healthy ***

***Stay at least fifty yards from dolphins**

***Move away cautiously if dolphins show signs of disturbance**

***Always put your engine in neutral when dolphins are near**

***Never feed dolphin. Feeding dolphin is against federal law and is harmful to them. It encourages them to seek human contact when looking for food rather than feeding themselves.**

