

Bottlenose Dolphins

Ways to reduce human-dolphin interactions



BRIAN BALMER/Sarasota Dolphin Research Program

Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are found throughout the world, including in the coastal and offshore areas of the Gulf of Mexico.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Bottlenose dolphins are 8 to 12 feet long and weigh between 400 and 600 pounds.
- Their backs are varying shades of gray, such as gray-green, gray-brown or light gray.
- Bottlenose dolphins are white below the jaw and on the belly.
- They have short, stubby beaks.
- They have 18 to 26 small, sharp teeth on each side of their upper and lower jaws.

People often view bottlenose dolphins as lovable and friendly creatures, just like Flipper, the famous 1960s movie and television star. But, these marine mammals are wild animals. Anglers should steer clear of them whenever possible. Dolphins are known to take bait and caught fish, get away with lures and gear, ingest hooks and become tangled in monofilament. Minimizing interactions with dolphins helps anglers protect their gear. It also helps protect dolphins from injury and ensures that they do not become dependent on humans for survival.

HOW TO MINIMIZE INTERACTIONS WITH DOLPHINS

- **Never feed dolphins.** Feeding dolphins is against federal law and is harmful to them. It encourages them to seek human contact when looking for food instead of feeding themselves.
- **Do not toss leftover bait to nearby dolphins.** Make use of leftover bait by taking it home to freeze for later or by giving it to your fishing neighbor. If you feed dolphins, they come to expect that all people are going to feed them.
- **Do not fish in areas where dolphins are actively feeding.** They may mistake your bait or catch for food.
- **Do not release caught fish in the presence of dolphins.** If you do, you reinforce the dolphins' association of recreational fishing activities with a food source. Quietly release the fish as far from the dolphin as possible.
- **Change locations if dolphins show interest in your bait or catch.**
- **Check your gear and terminal tackle.** Make sure they are in good shape and will not break too easily, resulting in a lost fish with a hook that could be eaten by a dolphin.
- **Do not cast your line toward a dolphin.**
- **Use corrodible hooks** (any hooks other than stainless steel).
- **Use circle hooks.** It is believed they reduce injuries to fish and dolphins.
- **Do not try to reel in a dolphin that may be hooked.** If a dolphin is hooked and the hook is set, cut the line as close to the dolphin as safely possible. If the hook is not set, put slack on the line and give the dolphin time to release itself.



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- **There is no approved gear to keep dolphins away when you are fishing.** The best thing to do is follow these tips and encourage fellow fishermen to do the same.
- **Stay at least 50 yards away from wild dolphins while boating or using personal watercraft.**
- **Stow used fishing line.** Make sure to collect any broken or used fishing line and discard it properly.
- **Do not swim with wild dolphins.** This type of behavior increases their interest in human activity, which results in more prevalent human interaction problems, such as begging and fishing line entanglements.

DON'T FEED THE DOLPHINS

Even though dolphins might approach your boat seeking food, you should never feed them. There are several important reasons why:

- By attracting dolphins to your boat, you may be teaching them not to fear boats when, in fact, they should.
- When dolphins become accustomed to being fed, they no longer feel the need to hunt or forage for themselves. This can cause problems when there are no people around to feed them.
- If you encourage dolphins to spend time around your boat, they are more likely to predate or steal the bait or catch from the end of your line.

DOLPHIN FACTS

- 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.

ABOUT BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS (*Tursiops truncatus*)

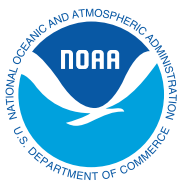
Bottlenose dolphins are marine mammals that live in tropical and temperate waters throughout the world. They live in socially-complex groups and are found in harbors, bays, gulfs and estuaries.

Dolphins live in the Black, Mediterranean and Baltic seas, as well as in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans. They also are found in the Gulf of Mexico.

They begin to eat fish when they reach a length of 4 feet 3 inches to 4 feet 10 inches. 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 throat. Dolphins eat a wide variety of fish, squid and crustaceans, such as shrimp. They are active both day and night and sleep for about eight hours a day.

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 may move very slowly, sometimes at the surface of the water, which is called logging. They also have been known to sleep with one eye closed.

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, as well as a well-developed sense of sight.



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References:

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