

# Dolphins and How They Live

## Synopsis

Dolphins have been a part of human history in the form of myths and folklore since practically the beginning of recorded time. The ancient Greeks worshipped dolphins, and in Greek law, it was illegal to harm a dolphin in any way.

People have always identified dolphins as intelligent and friendly. Research has shown that these animals are "social" animals, living together in groups called pods, and perhaps speaking their own language. Dolphins and How They Live takes the viewer on a voyage to meet a pod of wild Spotted Dolphins in the Bahamas, to learn how they conduct their daily lives.

Viewers will see how the dolphins hunt, play (Their activity for most of the day), as well as learn about their mating rituals and their sophisticated form and sonar. The program also introduces a man who works and plays with wild dolphins almost every day, and has come to know individual dolphins by sight. This rare glimpse into the lives of dolphins as they allow a film crew into their world is an unforgettable and educational experience for young and old alike.

## Questions to ask before viewing

1. What is a mammal? Name a few mammals. What do they have in common?
2. How are marine mammals like land mammals? How are they different?
3. What type of senses might a marine mammal develop which would allow it to survive in the water, compared with a land mammal?

## Questions to ask after viewing

1. What are some traits of mammals? (they have lungs, they give birth to live young, they feed their young milk, they are warm blooded, etc.)
2. What part of the dolphin's skeleton is still very similar to that of its land-going ancestors? (The finger bones in the flippers.)
3. Dolphins are frequently referred to as "hydrodynamic" animals. What does that mean? (Hydrodynamic means sleek in shape, so that the dolphin can slip easily through the water. It is the underwater equivalent of "aerodynamic," often applied to things which slip easily through air.)
4. The dolphin breathes through a blowhole. Why is the blowhole on top of its head? (So the dolphin can breathe without lifting its whole head out of the water.)
5. Why do dolphins play in the bow wave of boats? (most people believe that they do it for fun, because they get a free ride in the bow wave, like a surfer gets on a breaking wave at the beach.)
6. What is echolocation? (Echolocation is the term for the type of sonar system that dolphins use to

navigate and find food. Essentially, dolphins send out clicking sounds which bounce off of distant objects. The echoes bouncing back tell the dolphin where things are.)

7. How do dolphins use echolocation to hunt? (Since the sounds made by their echolocation systems can penetrate sand to a degree, dolphins can see through a few inches of sand to detect prey hiding in the sand. Since some of their favorite foods are dolphin to hunt for these fish.)
8. What other sounds do dolphins make? What do they mean? (Dolphins also make squeaks and chirps. Although nobody knows for sure, biologists suspect that these sounds may be the dolphin's own form of language.)
9. What are Spotted Dolphins not spotted? (When they are young. They don't begin to develop spots until about age four.)
10. What is a pod, and how big can it be? (A group of dolphins is called a pod, just as a group of fish is called a school, or a group of deer a herd. Spotted Dolphin pods may be as small as 2 animals, or as large as 100 or more. Some Spinner Dolphins travel in pods of over 1,000!)
11. How do researchers keep track of individual dolphins? (Most use a photo-identification system, where the dolphins are photographed and cataloged by their markings. These markings can be natural, like spot patterns, or scars.)
12. What is a permanent ID marking? (Dolphins which have scars or other markings which do not

change much over the years are very easy to keep track of because they have a distinctive look. These types of markings are called permanent ID markings.)

13. How can you tell if a dolphin is pregnant? (The same way you tell with people-they have a big rounded tummy!)
14. Why do you think dolphins are called "social" animals? (They like to hang out in groups, and they hate to be alone. They spend their lives living with and playing with each other, in effect, socializing.)
15. Why is it that when a dolphin reaches sexual maturity, it already knows how to mate? (Because dolphins practice mating from an early age.)
16. What do you call a baby dolphin? (A calf.)
17. What is the Marine Mammal Protection Act? (This U.S. law protects all marine mammals in U.S. waters from harassment.)

#### **Questions for discussion**

- Why do people think dolphins are smart? What things do they do to make us think this? Are there other possible explanations for their behavior?
- Why should we protect dolphins?
- What would happen if there were no more dolphins in the oceans? Would it affect us? What about the food chain.

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#### **Length**

- 20 minutes

#### **Subject area**

- Life Science

#### **Audience Levels**

- Intermediate-Adult

#### **Catalog Number**

- 8886

**AIMS Multimedia**  
9710 DeSoto Avenue  
Chatsworth, Ca 91311  
(818) 773-4300  
[www.aimsmultimedia.com](http://www.aimsmultimedia.com)

AIMS  
Discussion Guide

## **Dolphins and How**

## **They Live**

### **Objectives**

- To introduce the audience to a marine mammal species.
- To teach the importance of preserving all living things, including the dolphin.
- To help the audience to appreciate the role of marine mammals in the ecosystem.
- To examine the physical and evolutionary differences and similarities between marine and terrestrial mammals.

