

Spinner Dolphin



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FastFacts

- Species name is *Stella longirostris*, and there are four subspecies of spinner dolphins.
- Their colouration is a type of camouflage known as counter shading. It helps conceal the dolphins from predators and prey.
- The species is pantropical and occurs in tropical and subtropical waters around the world.
- They often feed at great depths, diving greater than 250m.
- The oldest spinner dolphin known was 24.5 years.
- Dolphins talk to each other with a complex array of clicks and whistles.

The Acrobat of the Sea

The spinner dolphin gets its name from its spectacular acrobatic displays. They have the ability to leap and spin longitudinally while in the air. They can make as many as 7 complete spins before diving back into the water. The characteristic spinning of this dolphin is thought to be used as communication, such as males spinning to attract females. One suggestion is that the great cauldron of bubbles created when exiting and re-entering the water may act as a target for echolocation by other individuals in the group. Another theory is that the spinning behaviour may assist in the removal of parasites. Alternatively they may spin just for fun!

Like all dolphins, spinner dolphins are very social and they group in pods of over 1000 individuals, but most commonly their group size is less than 250. Their pods are comprised of family members as well as learned associations. There is some segregation by age and sex among groups. It is thought that such segregation is temporary and most pronounced during migration. Spinner dolphins are often found in close association with yellowfin tuna, spotted dolphins, small to medium-sized whales and marine birds. The associations appear to be linked to feeding. They feed at night evidently to prey on deep-ocean organisms that migrate towards the surface at night. Their diet consists of pelagic fish, squids and shrimps.

LATINNAME

Stenella longirostris



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Identification and Mating

The body size, shape and colour patterns of the spinner dolphin vary depending on their geographical location. Spinner dolphins have a streamlined body with a dark grey cape and fading to white on its lower jaw and ventral side. This colouration is known as countershading. They have a long and thin rostrum, a triangular dorsal fin and their flippers are small and pointed at the tips. The spinner dolphin has more teeth than any other species of dolphin.

A new born calf measures between 70 and 80 cm in length. Adults range from 129 - 235 cm and reach a body mass of 23 - 80 kg, depending on the population they belong to.

Mating in spinner dolphins appears to be promiscuous, and like many dolphins, courtship behaviour is often observed. Females reach sexual maturity between 4 and 7 years of age. Males become mature at 7 to 10 years. Calves are born every 3 years. The gestation period is 10.5 months and once the calf is born it will nurse for up to 2 years.

Conservation Status

The current conservation status of the spinner dolphin is listed as Lower Risk - Conservation dependant under the IUCN Red List 2008.

Threats to the species include: Incidental by-catch in gill-net and purse-seine fisheries; a small number are caught by harpoon fisheries and utilised for human consumption or bait; pollution as a result of oil spills and industrial run-off; entanglement in marine debris; and tourism and development may affect the near-shore habitat of the species.

Sources

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