



Striped Dolphin

Stenella coeruleoalba

About the Species

Striped dolphins are among the most abundant and widespread dolphins in the world. They prefer deep tropical to warm temperate oceanic waters, and are attracted to upwelling areas, where deep, cold, nutrient-rich water rises toward the surface, and convergence zones, where ocean currents meet.

Striped dolphins are usually found in tight, cohesive groups of about 25 to 100 individuals and have been observed breaching, jumping, and leaping over 20 feet above the surface of the water. They display a unique behavior called roto-tailing, when the animal leaps high out of the water and vigorously rotates its tail while airborne.

Striped dolphins in the United States are not endangered or threatened. Like all marine mammals, they are protected under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#). NOAA Fisheries is committed to conserving striped dolphins, and our scientists and partners use a variety of innovative techniques to study and protect this species.

Appearance

Male striped dolphins can reach lengths of about 9 feet and weigh up to 350 pounds, while females can reach up to 8 feet and 330 pounds. They have a small to medium-sized, robust, sleek body with a long, defined beak and round forehead (known as a melon). This species has 43 to 50 pairs of small, sharp, conical teeth in the upper and lower jaws. Their dorsal fin is hooked, tall, and located mid-back.

Striped dolphins are known for their distinct and striking coloration pattern, which includes bold, thin stripes that extend from the eye to the flipper and another set of stripes down the side of the body to the anal region. This unique coloration distinguishes the striped dolphin from other cetacean species and is the origin of its common name.

The striped dolphin's beak, tapered flipper, tail, and back (or cape) are dark blue/gray. The area just above the side stripe is bluish or light gray and creates a contrasting shoulder blaze that curves back and up toward the animal's dorsal fin. The underside of the body is white to pinkish and much lighter than the rest of the body.

The markings and coloration of this species may vary by individual and geographic location. Calves and juveniles may have more muted colorations and patterns.

Behavior and Diet

Striped dolphins are usually found in tight, cohesive groups averaging between 25 and 100 individuals, but they have occasionally been seen in larger groups of up to several hundred and even thousands of animals. Within these schools, there is a complex system of individuals that may be organized by age, sex, and breeding status. Striped dolphins rarely associate with other species of whales, dolphins, and seabirds.

Information from: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/striped-dolphin>

Their surface behavior is often characterized as sociable, athletic, energetic, active, and nimble with rapid swimming. They can often be observed breaching, roto-tailing (a circular motion using the tail while jumping out of the water), jumping, and leaping 20 feet above the surface. In the eastern tropical Pacific, field biologists and fishermen call striped dolphins "streakers" because they avoid vessels by rapidly swimming away.

Striped dolphins feed throughout the water column on a diverse diet of fish and cephalopods (e.g., squid and octopus). They are capable of diving to at least 2,300 feet.

Where They Live

Striped dolphins prefer tropical to warm temperate waters (52 to 84° F) that are oceanic and deep. They are mainly found in waters seaward of the continental shelf from 50°N to 40°S and are often linked to upwelling areas and convergence zones.

Striped dolphins are found worldwide. Their range includes waters off Greenland, northern Europe (United Kingdom, Denmark), the Mediterranean Sea, Japan, Argentina, South Africa, western Australia, and New Zealand.

In the United States, they can be found off the west coast, in the northwestern Atlantic, and in the Gulf of Mexico. They also live in the waters off Hawaii, but do not live in the colder temperate and boreal waters of Alaska. This species has been documented outside its normal range in areas such as the Faroe Islands, southern Greenland, the Kamchatka Peninsula, and Prince Edward Island.

Lifespan & Reproduction

The estimated lifespan of striped dolphins is up to 58 years. They become sexually mature when they reach about 7 feet in length—between the ages of 5 and 13 years for females and 7 and 15 years for males. Their mating system is generally unknown, but is thought to be polygynous, meaning one male mates with more than one female. Every 3 to 4 years, females give birth to a single 3-foot-long calf during the summer or autumn after a gestation period of about 1 year. Lactation lasts 12 to 18 months.

Threats

Entanglement in Fishing Gear

One of the main threats to striped dolphins is becoming entangled or captured in commercial fishing gear such as trawls, gillnets, purse-seine nets, and hand-harpoons.