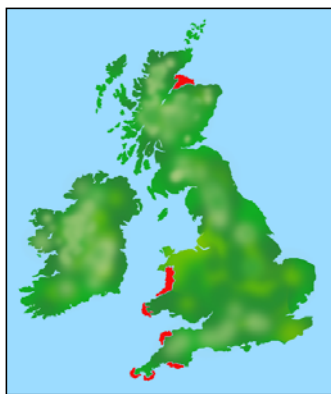


BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS

Bottlenose dolphins are agile, gregarious and highly intelligent animals. They communicate using body movements and sounds, often beyond human perception. They also use a series of clicking noises and then listen for the resulting echoes that bounce off underwater objects. This is called echolocation and allows them to “see” and map their surroundings.



DISTRIBUTION RANGE OF BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS:

Bottlenose dolphins live in coastal areas all over the world, from the tropical waters of Australia and Florida to the cooler seas of the UK. Unlike dolphins living further offshore, those living nearer to coastlines tend not to migrate to other areas. In Britain, dolphins are thought to be resident most of the year in the Moray Firth (Scotland), Cardigan Bay (Wales) and off the coasts of Devon and Cornwall (see map on the left).



SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Tursiops truncatus*
CLASS: Mammalia
ORDER: Odontocete
FAMILY: Delphinidae
DISTRIBUTION: Tropical, subtropical and temperate oceans worldwide

SIZE AND APPEARANCE:

Average size ranges from 1.8 to 4m long and 150 to 200kg in weight, but some can reach more than 650kg. Dolphins living further offshore tend to be larger and fatter with extra blubber to keep them warm in colder waters. They have a long streamlined body and a curved dorsal fin. Their backs are black or dark grey, their flanks and belly slightly lighter. Their distinctive blunt snout or rostrum has given them their name.

BEHAVIOUR:

Bottlenose dolphins are social animals and live in schools - family groups made up of a few to more than a thousand individuals. Dolphins of similar sex or age often form and spend time in peer sub-groups. In times of hardship or danger, schools can support and defend each other. In Scotland's Moray Firth bottlenose dolphins either feed alone or in groups. They can stun fish with sound, use natural and man-made barriers to round-up fish or feed in association with fishermen.

DIET:

Bottlenose dolphins feed on fish, squid and other invertebrates, depending on what is available.

LIFE EXPECTANCY:

Bottlenose dolphins can live up to 30-50 years in the wild. The life expectancy of dolphins in captivity is reduced as a result of psychological and physiological stress.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

The overall population size of bottlenose dolphins around the world is unknown. Extensive long-term monitoring is needed to gather data on population numbers. What is well documented, however, is a growing range of environmental threats prompting widespread concerns over long-term survival of this species and the maintenance of a healthy marine environment on which it depends. Some populations such as those in the Black Sea and Mediterranean are highly endangered.

Bottlenose dolphins in UK waters are protected by law and it is illegal to kill, injure or capture them.



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DOLPHINS AND THEIR YOUNG:

Females become sexually mature aged 7-12 years. After a pregnancy term of approximately 12 months they give birth to a single calf every 2-3 years. There is a strong social bond between mothers and their young, and a unique 'signature' whistle enables the calf to identify its mother amongst scores of other dolphins.

New born calves are almost half the length of their mothers, vary between 1 and 1.3m in length and weigh between 14 and 30kg. Calves can swim straight away, and usually stay with their mother for around 3-6 years, during which they learn the necessary skills to survive as an adult.

THREATS TO BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS:

Populations of bottlenose dolphins in British waters are at risk from marine pollution by industrial chemicals and inadequately treated sewage, which can damage their ability to reproduce and fend off diseases. Noise pollution from fishing vessels, underwater explosions and high-powered sonar from seismic exploration or military activities can severely interfere with dolphins' ability to communicate, navigate and find prey. The latter can even be fatal. Overfishing depletes dolphins' prey species and thousands of dolphins drown each year when they are accidentally caught in fishing nets.

In countries outside the UK dolphins are also killed for meat and captured for display in dolphinariums. Climate change and a thinning ozone layer may lead to changes in ocean circulation patterns and affects the marine food chain, representing looming long-term threats to dolphins worldwide.

HOW CARE FOR THE WILD INTERNATIONAL HELPS BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS:

CFTWI supports the North-East Scotland-based Cetacean Research and Rescue Unit (CRRU), which protects and studies an isolated population of between 90 and 170 bottlenose dolphins in the Moray Firth - the world's northernmost bottlenose dolphin colony.

The CRRU has established a 24-hour emergency rescue team for stranded dolphins and whales, who are unable to return to the sea unaided. These animals will generally not survive for more than a few hours without help. 60% of the UK's strandings occur on this area of Scotland's coast, which provides one of the best areas for whales, dolphins and porpoises in Western Europe. CRRU receives over 700 call-outs each year and has successfully saved the lives of many whales and dolphins. We also work at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to protect dolphins against targeted hunting, fisheries bycatch and environmental threats.

Stardance (pictured right) is one of the dolphins, who thanks to CFTWI, benefits from the efforts of the Cetacean Research and Rescue Unit in Scotland.



Photos © CRRU



If you would like to help CFTWI protect dolphins or other wild animals please contact:

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E-mail: info@careforthewild.com Web: www.careforthewild.com

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