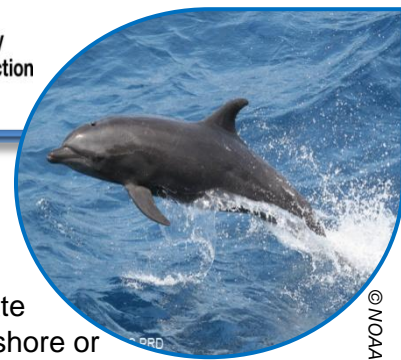


Fact Sheet:

Bottlenose Dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*



© NOAA NMFS SWFSC PRD

Bottlenose dolphins (BNDs) are members of the order Cetacea (dolphins, porpoises, and whales) and of the suborder odontocete (toothed whales such as dolphins and porpoises). BNDs are perhaps the most well known cetacean largely due to their playfulness, intelligence and (sadly) their popularity with the captivity industry.

Physical Description

As the name implies, BNDs have a very pronounced beak, or rostrum. As an odontocete, BND have between 75-100 teeth and a single blowhole on top of its head. Adults can reach 6-12.5 ft (1.8-3.8 m) in length, weigh between 300-1433 lb (136-650 kg), and live up to 40-50 years. In general, their streamlined bodies range from light to dark gray in coloration on their dorsal side with a lighter belly. They also have a tall, curved dorsal fin.

Behavior

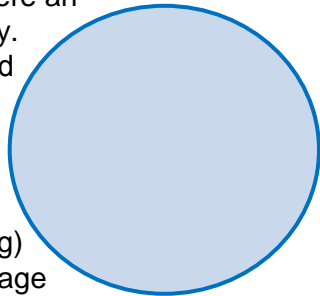
BNDs are highly social animals and are found in groups, called pods, of two to several hundred individuals. They are extremely fast, reaching bursts of speed of up to 30 mph. They often exhibit numerous surface behaviors such as breaching and bowriding on ships.

Diet

BNDs feed on a variety of prey, such as fishes, squid, and crustaceans. Like other odontocetes, BNDs have the ability to echolocate, a communication method where they project high frequency clicking sounds out into their environment and listen to the returning echo. The echo helps them locate prey, navigate underwater, and communicate.

Reproduction

There's a wide range, 5-14 yrs, where an individual can reach sexual maturity. There's a 12 month gestation period and females give birth about once every 2-4 yrs. Baby dolphins are called calves and are only about 3.6-4.3 ft (1.1-1.3 m) long and weigh about 30-40 lbs (13.6-18.1 kg) when they're born – about the average size of a 5-yr old child!



BND Mom and Calf
© WSPA

Distribution

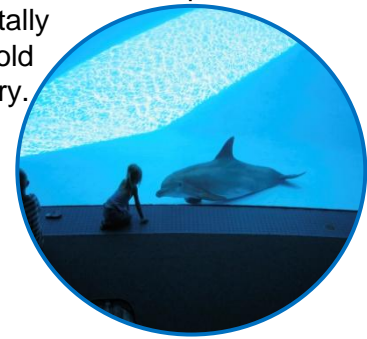
BNDs have a worldwide distribution and are found in offshore areas in all temperate tropical waters. There are inshore or coastal populations and offshore populations that only inhabit pelagic waters along the continental shelf.



© Hammond PS, et al. 2008. *Tursiops truncatus*. In: IUCN 2010. IUCN Red List of Threat. Sp. Vs 2010.1. <www.iucnredlist.org>. Downloaded 03 June 2010.

Threats

Entanglements in fishing gear (called bycatch), such as with gillnet, seine, trawl, and longline fisheries, is a major threat to BNDs. Other threats include exposure to pollutants, viral outbreaks, and habitat degradation. Harvesting of BNDs for food still exists in Japan and Taiwan, and they are also brutally captured from the wild to be sold into the captive dolphin industry.



Captive dolphin
© Zac Brown

Status

The worldwide population is estimated to be 600,000. The species that most people are familiar with is *Tursiops truncatus*. *T. aduncus* is another species found in the Indo-Pacific region. There's also a Black Sea subspecies called *T. truncatus ponticus*. *T. truncatus* are classified as "Data Deficient" on the IUCN Red List and the Western North Atlantic Coastal stock is considered depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). *T. truncatus ponticus* is considered endangered under the IUCN. Like all cetaceans, BNDs are protected under the MMPA in the U.S.



Photo: WSPA



Photo: Ken Usami