

Dolphins

What Do Dolphins Look Like?

A dolphin is a marine animal that is part of the whale family. Some can grow up to 9.8 metres and weigh over 5000kg. Hector's dolphins, the smallest known species, only reach an average length of 1.2 metres and an average weight of 50kg.

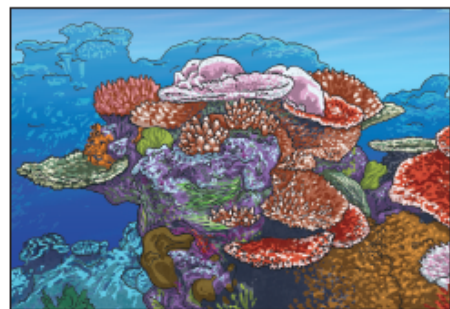


Dolphins have smooth, rubbery skin and are usually a mixture of black, white and grey in colour. They have two fins on their sides, a triangular fin on their back and a tail. A dolphin's tail, which propels the animal in lunges and dives, is horizontal unlike fish. Like other whales, they have an insulating layer of fat under the skin called blubber to protect them in the harsh cold of the freezing seas.

Dolphins are mammals, not fish, so they are warm-blooded and are able to maintain their body temperature. Like other whales, they have lungs and breathe through a single nostril called the blowhole which is located on the top of their head. The blowhole is opened at the surface of the water to inhale and exhale air.

Where Do Dolphins Live?

Dolphins live in the world's seas, oceans and rivers. They like to be with other dolphins, living together in groups called pods. In the wild, bottlenose dolphin pods are formed based on age, sex and family relationships. This could be mothers and their newborns or most recent offspring, a mix of male and female young dolphins and adult males either alone or in pairs. Dusky dolphins, commonly found off the coast of New Zealand, have been known to create superpods of over a thousand dolphins, due to being so well fed.



Some dolphin pods like to live in coastal areas while others choose to live in shallow waters away from the coast or further out to sea.

The Amazon river dolphin prefers to live in freshwater rivers and lakes. Other dolphins, such as the bottlenose dolphin, may visit lakes and can be seen close to cities.

Hunting Behaviour

Bottlenose dolphins are unique hunters - they hunt their prey by swimming around fish in large circles while beating their tails down hard to stir up the shallow silt (sea floor), making the water murky. The lead dolphin continues to do this, making the circle smaller and smaller, eventually trapping the fish like in a net. As the fish leap out of the circle to escape, the other dolphins catch them in their mouths.



Spinner dolphins, commonly found in the Pacific Ocean, can often be found swimming near tuna as the fish relies on the dolphins to find food. The dolphins communicate through clicks and whistles as they dive below the water. They swim under lantern fish to drive them to the surface for the pod and other fish to feed on.

A bottlenose dolphin can jump out of the water as high as 4.9 metres from the surface and can flip over onto their back, belly or side. This is known as breaching. They breach for many reasons, including to let other dolphins know there is food nearby.



Dolphins Questions

1. Find and copy one word which refers to something that lives in the sea.

2. Fill in the missing words.

A dolphin's tail, which _____ the animal in _____ and dives, is horizontal unlike fish.

3. Why do dolphins have a layer of blubber?

4. Number the events from 1-5 to show the order in which they occur. The first one has been done for you.

	They beat their tail down hard to stir up the shallow silt.
	Fish leap out of the circle to escape.
1	Bottlenose dolphins hunt their prey by swimming around in large circles ready to close in.
	The water changes to become opaque.
	The lead dolphin makes the circle smaller and smaller to trap the fish like in a net.

5. Which type of dolphins are commonly found in the Pacific Ocean? Tick one.

- bottlenose dolphins
- Amazon river dolphins
- dusky dolphins
- spinner dolphins

6. Look at the section about bottlenose dolphin's hunting techniques. Compare this to the spinner dolphins hunting techniques mentioned in the text. How are these similar?

Dolphins Questions

7. Compare pods to human families. How are these similar or different?

8. Summarise what you have learnt about dolphins using 25 words or fewer.

Dolphin Answers

1. Find and copy one word which refers to something that lives in the sea.

marine

2. Fill in the missing words.

A dolphin's tail, which **propels** the animal in **lunges** and dives, is horizontal unlike fish.

3. Why do dolphins have a layer of blubber?

Dolphins have an insulating layer of fat under the skin called blubber to protect them in the harsh cold of the freezing seas.

4. Number the events from 1-5 to show the order in which they occur. The first one has been done for you.

2	They beat their tail down hard to stir up the shallow silt.
5	Fish leap out of the circle to escape.
1	Bottlenose dolphins hunt their prey by swimming around in large circles ready to close in.
3	The water changes to become opaque.
4	The lead dolphin makes the circle smaller and smaller to trap the fish like in a net.

5. Which type of dolphins are commonly found in the Pacific Ocean? Tick one.

- bottlenose dolphins
 Amazon river dolphins
 dusky dolphins
 spinner dolphins

6. Look at the section about bottlenose dolphin's hunting techniques. Compare this to the spinner dolphins hunting techniques mentioned in the text. How are these similar?

Pupils' responses will vary but should include facts from the text that are similar such as they catch the fish in a 'net-like' motion.

Dolphin Answers

7. Compare pods to human families. How are these similar or different?

Pupils' responses will vary. Accept similarities for family relationships such as mother and child, a mix of male and female in a family, single or pair of adult males. Differences could include human families will sometimes contain single or pair of females.

8. Summarise what you have learnt about dolphins using 25 words or fewer.

Answers will vary.