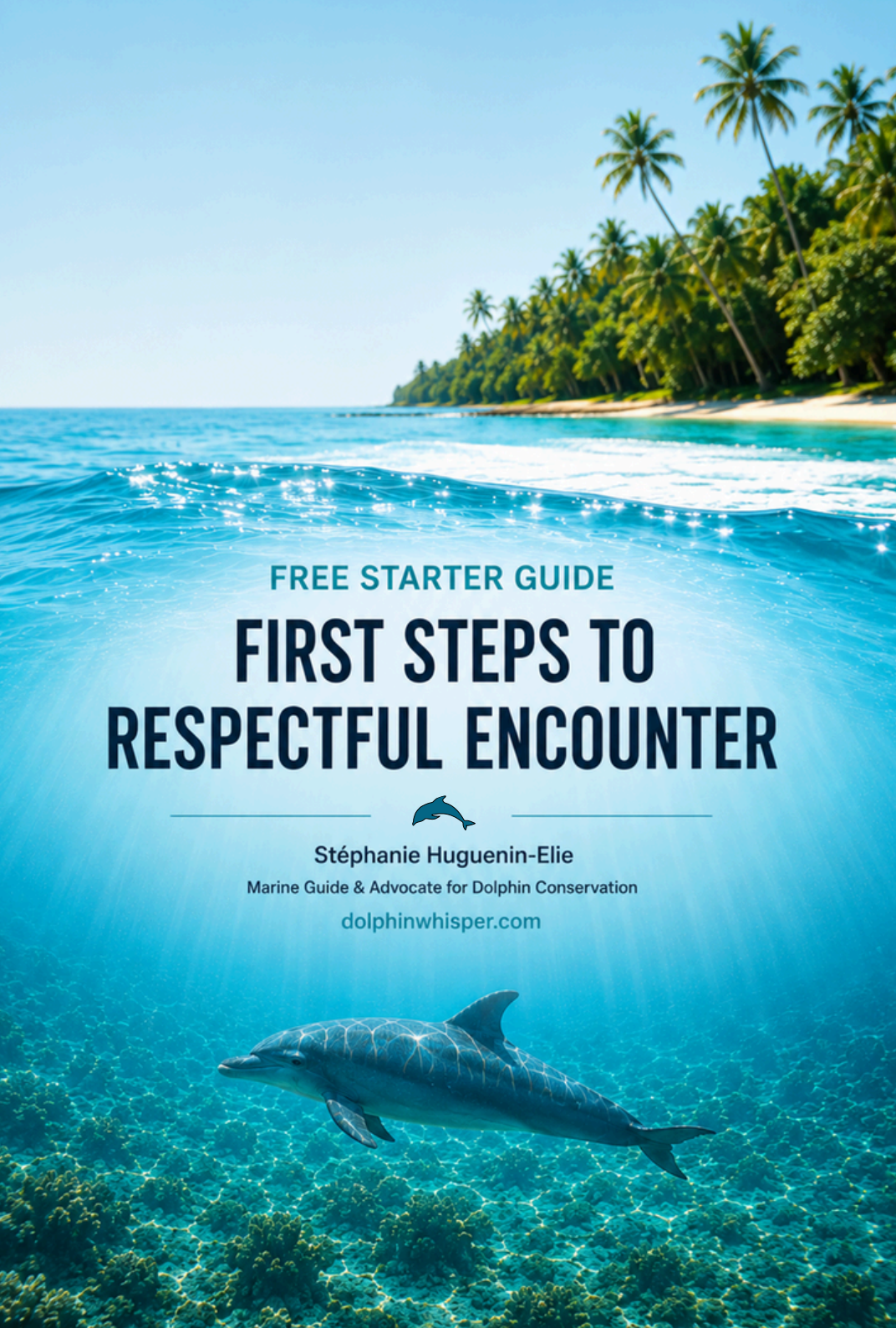


A vibrant tropical beach scene with turquoise water, white sand, and a dense line of palm trees under a clear blue sky. The scene is split horizontally, with the top half showing the beach and the bottom half showing an underwater view of a dolphin swimming over a coral reef.

FREE STARTER GUIDE

FIRST STEPS TO RESPECTFUL ENCOUNTER



Stéphanie Huguenin-Elie

Marine Guide & Advocate for Dolphin Conservation

dolphinwhisper.com





Introduction

Understanding to Better Observe

Dolphins have always fascinated us. Their intelligence, agility in water, and seemingly playful behavior captivate many people. They sometimes give the impression of a genuine connection with humans.

But who are they really?

Does our presence have an impact on them?

And why is it important to learn more before observing them in the wild?

Encountering dolphins is a unique, often unforgettable experience. But behind this magic lies a more fragile reality that we sometimes ignore.

One of the objective of Dolphin Whisper is to inform and raise awareness, without judgment. By better understanding these animals, everyone can adopt a more appropriate attitude — and perhaps pass on these good practices to other travelers.



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Dolphins: who are they really?

Dolphins basics

Dolphins are **marine mammals**.

They therefore share several characteristics with humans.

They breathe air through lungs and must regularly surface to breathe through an opening called a blowhole.

Their breath-holding can last up to about 8 minutes, but is generally between 2 and 4 minutes.

They maintain a stable **body temperature around 37°C**.

Females carry their young for 12 to 18 months depending on the species and give birth to a calf that is **born tail-first**.

Their nursing period lasts from **one, two or up to three years** depending on the species. The young even have a few hairs on their rostrum, which quickly disappear with water friction.

Dolphins **can dive to about 250 meters** depending on the species, although most of their activities occur between 100 and 150 meters deep.

They are also great travelers: they **can cover up to 100 kilometers per day**.

Their diet varies by species, but consists mainly of **fish and squid**.



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A different way of life

Despite some similarities with humans, it is essential to understand that dolphins live in a world very different from ours.

They **are sentient animals** and their universe is primarily **aquatic and acoustic**, while ours is terrestrial and predominantly visual.

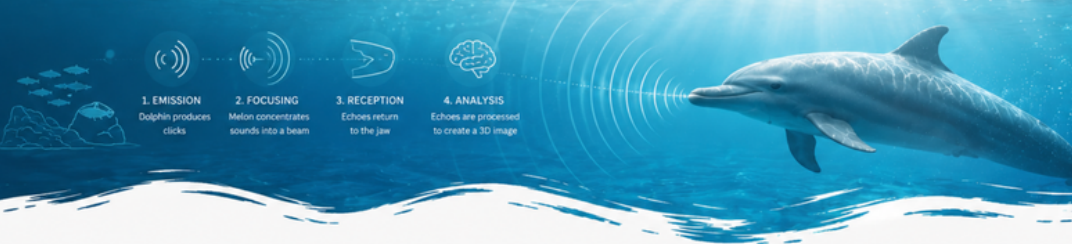
Their **way of life is largely instinctive. Their behaviors respond to essential needs: feeding, reproducing, resting, protecting themselves.**

This is why it is important to consider the dolphin as an animal in its own right and **observe them without filtering their behaviour through human interpretations, which can lead to incorrect assumptions.**



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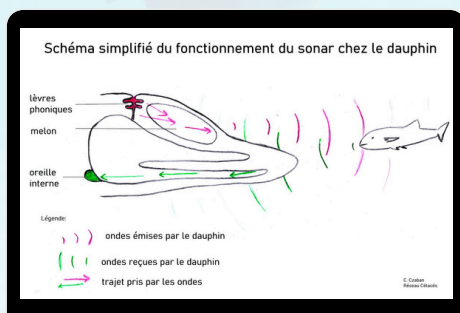


Echolocation – A Living Sonar

Echolocation allows dolphins to perceive their environment in 3D through "acoustic vision" produced by the melon.

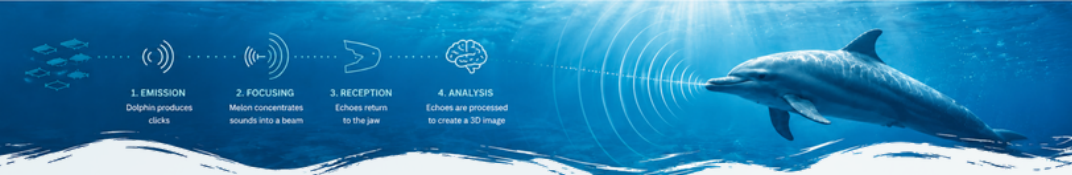
HOW IT WORKS

1. **EMISSION:** The dolphin produces clicks via its phonic lips
2. **FOCUSING:** The melon (frontal organ) concentrates sounds into a beam
3. **RECEPTION:** Echoes return and are captured by the jaw
4. **ANALYSIS:** Echoes are processed by a specialized neural circuit, from the inferior colliculus to the auditory cortex, linked with the cerebellum, allowing real-time formation of a 3D acoustic image.



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1. EMISSION
Dolphin produces clicks

2. FOCUSING
Melon concentrates sounds into a beam

3. RECEPTION
Echoes return to the jaw

4. ANALYSIS
Echoes are processed to create a 3D image

Sophisticated Communication

The Language of Dolphins

Dolphins communicate through a complex system of sounds & body language.

TYPES OF VOCALIZATIONS



SIGNATURE WHISTLES:

Unique personal name of each individual



ECHOLOCATION CLICKS:

Navigation and hunting



BURST-PULSE:

Emotional sounds (excitement, aggression, play)



SOCIAL WHISTLES:

Communication between group members
(maximum range 5 kilometers)



BODY COMMUNICATION

Expressive jumps

Tactile contacts for reassurance or caressing

Significant body movements, positioning, swimming speed, caudal tail slapping (sign of dominance), mouth opening.

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SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Dolphins live according to a **fusion-fission** social organization, where groups form and separate according to needs and context.

DIALECTS AND CULTURE

Dolphins **develop cultures** specific to each population, based on social traditions, communication modes and techniques, such as tool use, transmitted from generation to generation, particularly from mother to calf.

HUNTING

The specific hunting techniques that certain dolphin populations develop are **unique responses to specific environmental conditions** present only in certain regions of the globe. Such as sponging, strand feeding mud ring fishing, shelling, kerplunking.

ACTIVE KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

Young learn through **observation, imitation and active accompaniment** by adults, particularly females.

Play, often perceived as recreational, is actually a fundamental learning tool: it allows the development of social, motor, cognitive, and relational skills necessary for adult life.



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Life & conservation

CURRENT THREATS



Plastic and chemical pollution of the oceans



Heavy maritime traffic and noise pollution



Climate change and ocean acidification



Overfishing and prey depletion



Irresponsible tourism and captivity

CLEAR ACTIONS TO SUPPORT DOLPHINS



Choose operators certified by WCA or Dolphin Whisper



Reduce your plastic consumption



Support marine research and sanctuaries



Share your knowledge with others



Refuse captive dolphin shows

Join the movement



Dolphin Whisper invites you to become an ambassador of a new relationship with dolphins. Every action and respectful choice matters!



Learn more:

dolphinwhisper.com



How to approach dolphins in the wild?

What is a Respectful Approach

A respectful approach to dolphins consists of observing without disturbing. It is based on rules established from scientific research on dolphin behavior and the impact of tourism.

The respectful approach is not limited to respecting distances and speeds. Respect is also demonstrated by **our way of presenting ourselves to them** and **our behavior on board and in the water**.

Having the awareness that allows us to observe them as individuals in their own right without our "human" interpretations and **the patience** that allows us to give them the space and time to open the door to their world and let them initiate or stop the interaction.



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IMPACT OF OUR PRESENCE

Dolphin watching can have real consequences on dolphin health, especially when poorly managed.

Each encounter is a tiny part of what they have experienced or will experience for the rest of the day.

A dolphin may, for example, have spent several hours hunting and then have a vital need for rest. Disturbing them at that moment, even briefly, can prevent them from recovering the energy necessary for their survival later in the day.

LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES

Even when respecting the rules, repeated boat presence can modify dolphin behavior and, in the long term, unbalance their energy budget, compromising population survival.

INCREASED BEHAVIORS: SWIMMING (MOVEMENTS, INTERACTIONS)

DECREASED BEHAVIORS: REST, NUTRITION

Human presence can, in the case of young presence, decrease the number of feedings, which in the long term could put the animal in a vulnerable situation.

Attributing human emotions to dolphins may seem natural, but it can lead to misunderstandings ... and inappropriate behaviors.



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Myths & Reality

The Origin of the Industry

Popular myths about dolphins, rooted primarily in the cultural legacy of *Flipper*, have driven the expansion of dolphin tourism and sustained a fashionable but misleading vision that persists today

DOLPHINS “SING” WHEN THEY ARE HAPPY

REALITY Dolphins have different vocalizations that all have varied utility and meaning. Some vocalizations can also be alarms.

PLAY TIME ARE PURELY RECREATIONAL

REALITY Play is a fundamental learning tool: it allows the development of social, cognitive, motor, and relational skills necessary for adult life.

A CALM INTERACTION IS ALWAYS POSITIVE

REALITY Even without overt disturbance, human presence can alter dolphins' behaviour by disrupting essential activities such as resting and hunting, forcing them into energetically costly interactions.



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DOLPHINS SEEK TO FORM “FRIENDSHIPS” WHEN THEY APPROACH

REALITY Most approaches are investigative, allowing dolphins to assess potential threats by directing their echolocation towards us.

THEY APPROACH BOATS (BOWRIDING) TO PLAY WITH US

REALITY Dolphins often use the bow of boats to save energy and gain speed, in much the same way birds use air currents.

DOLPHINS JUMP BECAUSE THEY ARE HAPPY OR CELEBRATING

REALITY Jumps serve multiple functional purposes, such as communication, reorientation, parasite removal, or simply efficient movement. They are not reliable indicators of joy or emotional excitement.

DOLPHINS ARE ALWAYS SMILING

REALITY The apparent smile is simply the natural shape of a dolphin's jaw and rostrum. It does not reflect an emotional state



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Essential WCA Protocols

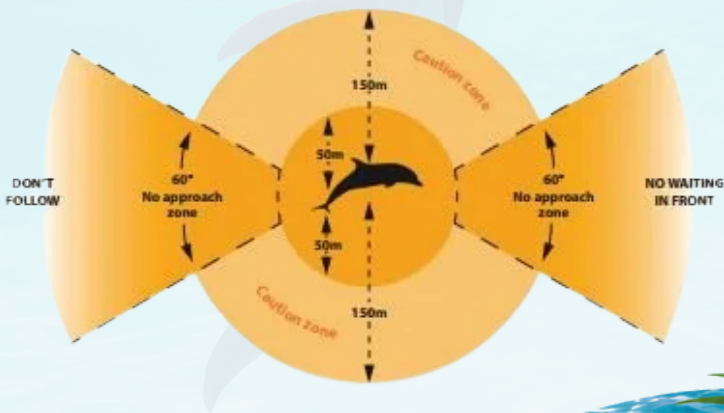
The World Cetacean Alliance (WCA) has established international guidelines for responsible cetacean observation.

DISTANCE ZONES

RED ZONE (0-100m): Prohibited – High risk of disturbance

ORANGE ZONE (100-300m): Slow and cautious approach only

GREEN ZONE (300m+): Safe and respectful observation



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Essential Protocols

PARALLEL APPROACH: Never frontal or from behind

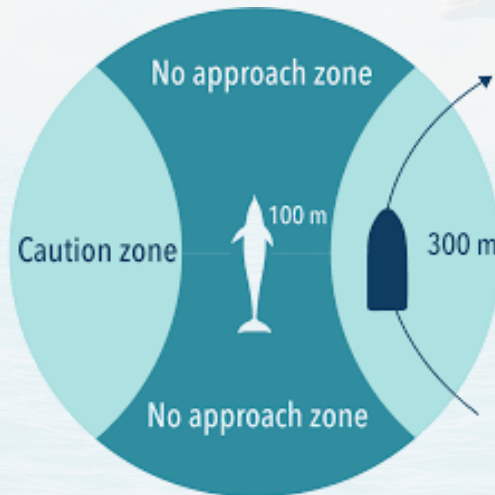
REDUCED SPEED: Maximum 5 knots in observation zone

ENGINE OFF: If dolphins approach spontaneously

RESPECT GROUPS: Never between mother and calf

TIME LIMITATION: 30 minutes maximum per group

No more than **three boats** on the same site in 300 meters



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Behavioral Guidelines



PROHIBITIONS

- Feeding dolphins (modifies their natural behavior)
- Swimming with them (stress and health risks)
- Touching or handling (major disturbance)
- Excessive noise (interferes with their communication)
- Dangling accessories (can impact dolphins)



GOOD PRACTICE

- Stay calm
- Let dolphins approach
- Gentle swimming (slow movements without splashing)
- Accessories well secured



ELEMENTS TO CHECK BEFORE APPROACH

- Take time (5 to 10 minutes) to assess the situation:
- What are they doing ? (hunting/resting/traveling/socializing)
- Is their movement slow or fast?
- How many are there? ($\frac{1}{4}$ of the group are underwater)
- Are there babies?
- What direction are they taking?
- Do they show signs of stress?



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OPTIMAL VS PROHIBITED MOMENTS

✓ OPTIMAL MOMENTS

- Socialization between dolphins
 - Milling (slow movements)
 - Group play
 - Surface rest

✗ PROHIBITED MOMENTS

- Hunting (vital activity)
 - Travel/migration
 - Deep rest
 - Caring for young

COMFORT & STRESS SIGNALS

✓ COMFORT SIGNALS

- Relaxed and fluid swimming
- Regular breathing
- Curiosity and voluntary approach
- Social play between individuals
- Maintaining proximity without stress

! STRESS SIGNALS

- Erratic swimming
- Accelerated breathing
 - Rapid flight
- Alarm vocalizations
- Repetitive tail slapping
- S-posture underwater
- Defensive line grouping



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EMOTIONAL FREQUENCIES



DISTURBING FREQUENCIES:

ANGER, FRUSTRATION, ANXIETY, FEAR, IMPATIENCE, AGITATION



HARMONIOUS FREQUENCIES:

CALM, SERENITY, RESPECT, GRATITUDE, AUTHENTIC WONDER, CONSCIOUS PRESENCE



IMMEDIATE REACTION:

IN CASE OF STRESS: STOP THE APPROACH, INCREASE DISTANCE, OBSERVE PASSIVELY UNTIL CALMING.

ACTIONS FOR THEIR PROTECTION

Clear Actions



Choose WCA or Dolphin Whisper certified operators



Reduce your plastic consumption



Support marine research and sanctuaries



Share your knowledge with your community



Refuse captive dolphin shows

WCA Certification

Operators complying with these rules may obtain "WCA Approved" certification or certification from a recognized conservation NGO or local federation.

Join the movement

Dolphin Whisper invites you to become an ambassador of this new relationship with dolphins. Every gesture counts, every respectful choice contributes to their freedom.

When people learn the truth, they choose better & dolphins stay free.



Learn more:

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