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Dolphins and Porpoises

By Guy Belleranti

Porpoises and dolphins are fascinating and beautiful sea creatures. They are in the group of whales called toothed whales.

Many people think dolphins and porpoises are fish, but this is simply not true. They are mammals, just like dogs, cats, horses, cows, deer, and humans. Like all mammals, dolphins and porpoises are warm-blooded, which means their body temperature always stays the same. While most other animals are born from eggs, mammals are born alive. Also, mammals have lungs and breathe air. Dolphins and porpoises need to come up to the surface of the water to breathe through the blowhole in the top of their heads.

Most porpoises and dolphins eat fish, squid, and crustaceans. However, the largest species of dolphin, the orca, also hunts seals, penguins, walruses, and whales.

Both porpoises and dolphins use echolocation. This means they send out sounds and then listen for the echoes bouncing back. Echolocation helps them find food and escape predators.

Both porpoises and dolphins are toothed whales. However, porpoise teeth are shaped differently than dolphin teeth. Dolphins have sharp, cone-shaped teeth, but porpoise teeth are spade-shaped and flatter.



A dolphin is a social animal with a pointed beak.

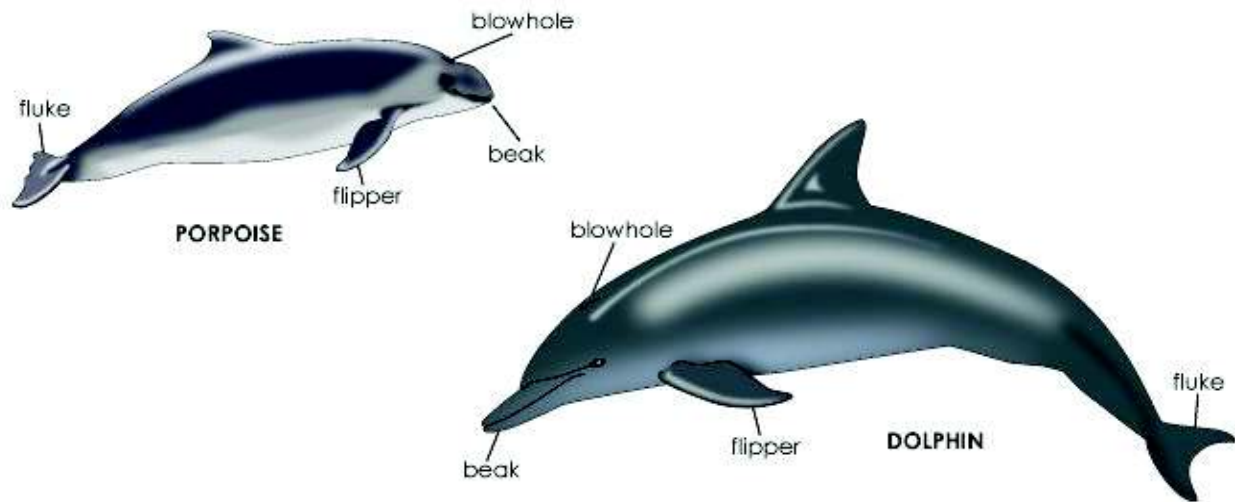


A porpoise is smaller and more shy than a dolphin. It has a rounded snout.

Their bodies are shaped differently, too. Porpoises are shorter with more rounded beaks and bodies. The dorsal fins on their backs are also shorter and less pointed. Dolphins, on the other hand, have longer, more pointed beaks. Their dorsal fins are taller and more pointed too.

Porpoises are usually under seven feet (two meters) long. Many dolphins are over ten feet (three meters). Orcas can grow over twenty feet long.

The life span of a dolphin is usually much longer than the life span of a porpoise. Dolphins can live 50 or more years. Porpoises seldom live longer than 15 years.



Dolphins are very social animals. They live in large groups called pods, with up to a dozen individuals. Dolphins enjoy interacting with humans. Sometimes they swim beside boats and make whistling and chirping sounds as they talk. Porpoises are much more shy than dolphins, and they tend to avoid human interaction. They usually live in smaller pods of 2 to 4 individuals. Their sounds can't be heard by our ears.



About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with wild animals and teaching others.

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1. List three ways mentioned in the article that dolphins and porpoises are alike.

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. What is the largest species of dolphin? _____

3. What is the author's purpose for writing this passage?

- a. to persuade readers to watch for dolphins and porpoises when they visit the ocean
- b. to entertain readers with a funny story about dolphins and porpoises
- c. to teach readers the similarities and differences between dolphins and porpoises
- d. to inform readers that dolphins and porpoises are endangered species

4. Both dolphins and porpoises...

- a. are gray fish found in the Atlantic Ocean
- b. live in large pods of 12 or more
- c. have the same type of teeth
- d. are types of whales

5. Explain the differences between a dolphin's dorsal fin and a porpoise's dorsal fin.

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Venn Diagram

