

Dolphins

Did you know that dolphins are whales? It's true. Dolphins are a kind of whale known as toothed whales. They are marine mammals that live mostly in shallow seas and feed on a variety of fish. Dolphins are very intelligent animals. They are also playful and seem to enjoy the company of people.

Dolphins are very fast swimmers. They have tail fins called flukes that are designed to propel them through the water and fins called pectoral fins that they use to change direction. Like all whales, dolphins breathe through a blowhole on top of their heads. They can hold their breath underwater for 10-20 minutes before having to come to the surface to breathe. Most dolphins have excellent hearing and eyesight. They use different sounds to communicate with each other. They also use a process called echolocation to locate objects in the water. Dolphins have an organ in their heads called a *melon* that is used for echolocation. They make clicking sounds that are used to create sound waves. Echolocation clicks are the loudest sounds made by any sea animal. The sound waves created by clicks bounce off objects in the ocean and give dolphins information about what is around them.

Dolphins live in groups called pods or schools. There are usually up to twelve dolphins in a pod. Sometimes, in areas where there is a lot of food, dolphins form temporary "superpods" that can number more than a thousand animals. Dolphins are known to take care of each other. They will stay with another dolphin that is sick or injured to help the sick or injured animal breathe by lifting it to the surface of the water. They have even been known to help human swimmers by protecting them from sharks. They do this by swimming in circles around people to keep sharks away.

One of the many signs of dolphins' intelligence is their ability to use tools and to teach their young how to use them. They break off pieces of sponges and use them to cover their snouts when they look for food. This is generally a behavior of female dolphins, and mother dolphins teach their daughters to do it.

Name _____



Date _____

Dolphins (Cont'd)

The thing that is most amazing about this behavior is that dolphins are not born knowing how to do it. They actually teach each other! A dolphin that is not taught to use a sponge to protect its snout will not do it.

Dolphins like to play. They can be seen play-fighting with each other or playing with seaweed. They also like to “surf” by riding ocean waves, and sometimes they follow boats to ride in the waves behind them. Dolphins will also sometimes play with human swimmers.

Dolphins Questions

1. Dolphins are
 - a. mammals.
 - b. sea animals.
 - c. whales.
 - d. All of the above

2. Dolphins live mostly in
 - a. shallow oceans.
 - b. rivers and lakes.
 - c. tropical rainforests.
 - d. cold, deep water.

3. Dolphins move through the water with tail fins called _____.

4. Dolphins can hold their breath under water for
 - a. only a few minutes.
 - b. 10-20 minute.
 - c. up to an hour.
 - d. as long as they need to because they can breathe under water.

5. Echolocation is
 - a. how dolphins communicate with each other.
 - b. a group of dolphins.
 - c. the way dolphins locate objects in the water.
 - d. where dolphins live.

6. Dolphins create sound waves by making sounds called
 - a. whistles.
 - b. echoes.
 - c. clicks.
 - d. trills.

Dolphins Questions (Cont'd)

7. A group of dolphins is called a _____ of _____.
8. Describe how dolphins take care of each other.
9. Describe how dolphins have been known to protect human swimmers from sharks.
10. A sign that dolphins are intelligent is that they
 - a. use tools.
 - b. teach each other.
 - c. Both of these
 - d. Neither of these

Name _____



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Dolphins Answers

1. d
2. a
3. flukes
4. b
5. c
6. c
7. pod or school
8. They will stay with another dolphin that is sick or injured to help the sick or injured animal breathe by lifting it to the surface of the water.
9. They swim in circles around people to keep sharks away.
10. c