

DOLPHINS & PORPOISES



FACTS

Dolphins and porpoises delight us with their playful antics and warm our hearts with their friendly faces. Marine species are the most well-known, but there are several species that live in freshwater rivers. All are air-breathing, warm-blooded mammals that nurse their young. The difference between a dolphin and a porpoise has to do with their appearance: dolphins have longer snouts, bigger mouths, more curved dorsal fins, and longer, leaner bodies than porpoises.

WHY THEY MATTER

Dolphins and porpoises are at the top of the food chain and have an important role in the overall balance of the marine environment. They can tell us a lot about the health of the ocean, such as the presence of pollution or the decline in fish. They are also very popular with tourists.

THREATS

Living close to shore is a problem for the dolphins. Bycatch—becoming tangled in recreational and commercial gill and trawl nets—is the biggest threat they face. Gillnets, for example, are made of a fine mesh that dolphins are unable to detect underwater and they accidentally swim into them and become caught. Other threats include being struck by boats, pollution in their habitat, coastal development and seabed mining.

PROTECTION

WWF works to end gill net use and trawling in Hector's and Maui's dolphin habitat. After the 2012 International Whaling Commission meeting, New Zealand agreed to ban gillnets in a portion of Maui's dolphin habitat. This is a positive step, but a ban throughout the dolphin's entire range is needed to ensure their survival. WWF is urging New Zealand Prime Minister John Key to protect the last remaining Maui's dolphins by prohibiting dangerous fishing gear from their habitat, safeguarding the region from sand mining and the threat of oil and gas exploration, and establishing a protected ocean corridor.