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**SPECIES FACT SHEET –**

# **Striped Dolphin**

## ***(Stenella coeruleoalba)***

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*Photo © Jean Michel Bompar*

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## Measurements

### Length

Newborn: 0.93-1.00 m  
Full grown: Up to 2.56 m  
(males slightly larger than females)

### Weight

Newborn: c. 7-10 kg  
Full grown: Up to 156 kg

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## Identification

### *At Sea*

Usually animated; often breaches and bow-rides. Grey blaze and two black stripes (one to flipper and the other along flanks to anus). Long-beaked but shorter than common dolphin.

### *On Land*

General form slender. Sharp, slightly incurved teeth (diameter 3 mm). Total tooth count: 90-110/90-110 (upper/lower jaw). No grooves in palate of skull.

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## Description

### *Head*

The striped dolphin is one of two long-beaked species found in our waters, the other is the common dolphin. Tapering forehead with distinct groove separating dark beak of moderate length. The beak is shorter than the common dolphin.

### *Body, Fin & Markings*

The most striking feature of striped dolphin is their bold grey and white colour pattern, with a long stripe from eye to anus and a shorter stripe from around the eye widening to the flipper. These stripes are dark grey or bluish-grey. There may be a short thin accessory stripe between the other two. Lacks yellow patches characteristic of common dolphin. A light grey blaze (variable in extent) sweeps up along the flanks from behind the eye towards the dorsal fin. Slender torpedo-shaped body. The dorsal fin is centrally-placed, slender, and sickle-shaped or erect. North Atlantic individuals may have a pale spot in the centre of the fin. The belly is white but can have a pinkish hue. The flippers are often light grey. The dorsal surface of the tail stock tends to be lighter than the dorsal surface in front of the dorsal fin. The tail fluke itself is dark and un-notched.

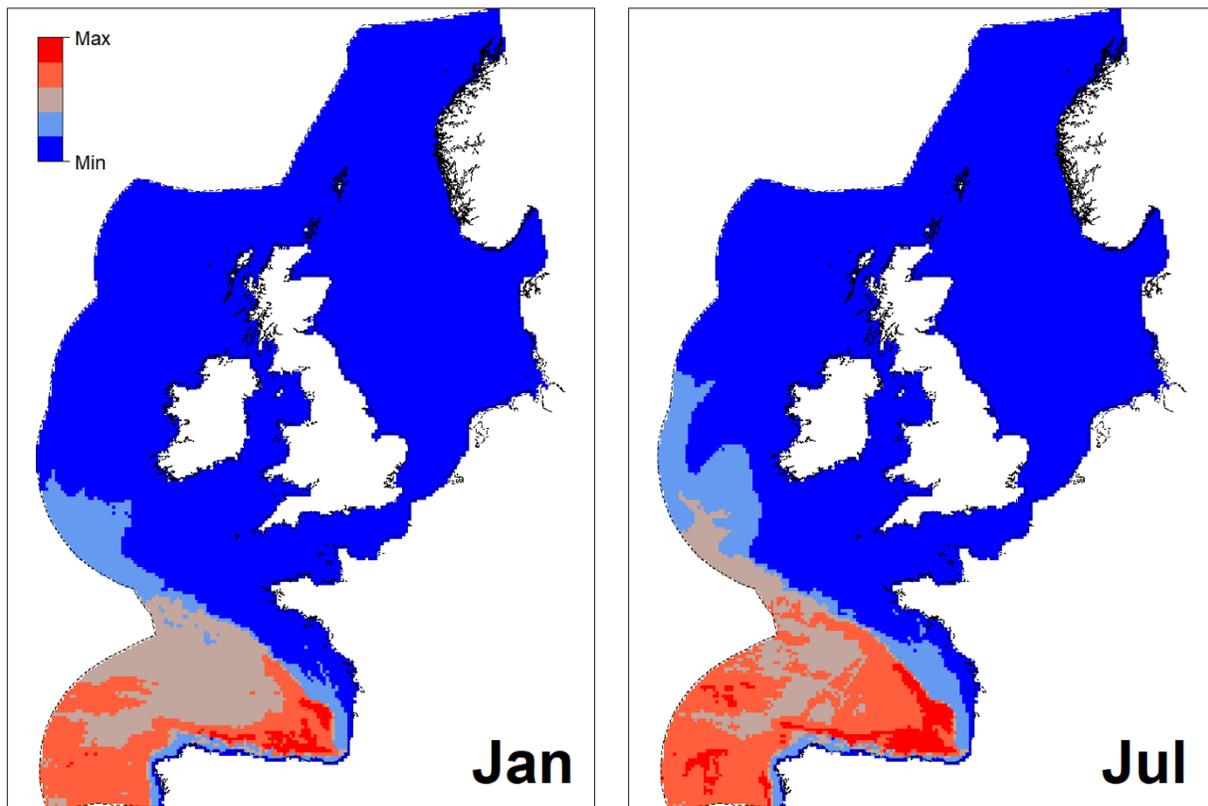
## Distribution

### ***Global Distribution***

It has worldwide distribution in tropical, subtropical and warm temperate seas of both hemispheres; the species mainly occurs in tropical and warm temperate waters (between 30° and 45°N).

### ***European Waters***

It is found in the eastern North Atlantic south of the British Isles and is the most frequently occurring dolphin in the Mediterranean Sea. The population in NE Atlantic is genetically distinct from that of the Mediterranean. In the NE Atlantic, it generally occurs further offshore than the common dolphin, with highest densities in the deep waters of the western Bay of Biscay and beyond the continental shelf of Spain, Portugal, and France. In recent years, possibly in response to global warming, the species has become more frequent further north (up to 66.5°N), with records in the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.



*Overall Distribution of Striped Dolphin around British Isles (Source: Waggitt et al., 2020)*

### **UK & Ireland**

An occasional visitor to the British Isles, it occurs mainly from the SW Approaches to the English Channel and the Irish Sea, offshore. It will occasionally stray into shelf waters further north to Scotland. Distribution is likely extended further north by Gulf Stream (occurring regularly in mid-Atlantic to at least 62°N). There has been a sharp increase in records around the UK since the 1980s and it is occasionally sighted in the North Sea.

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### **Abundance**

The difficulties in distinguishing common from striped dolphins, particularly from aerial surveys, has made it hard to arrive at abundance estimates for the species where the ranges of the two species overlap. Wide-scale surveys in summer 2016, covering the shelf seas of the eastern North Atlantic from southern Norway to Portugal yielded an abundance estimate of 372,340 individuals plus an estimated 158,167 unidentified common/striped dolphins (but probably mainly common). However, larger numbers are likely to be present further offshore beyond the survey area. Abundance estimates in the Mediterranean Sea are c. 118,000 individuals.

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### **Habitat**

It is usually found beyond the continental shelf, typically over the continental slope out to oceanic waters and often associated with convergence zones and waters influenced by upwelling. Most records of the species occur in sea surface temperatures of 18-22°C.

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### **Diet**

The genera *Delphinus* and *Stenella* are wide ranging in most warm temperate to tropical regions and therefore, not surprisingly, are opportunistic feeders with very variable diets depending on the region and season. They are meso- and benthopelagic feeders. Their diet consists of fish (for example, sprat, blue whiting, herring, mackerel, hake, sand-eel, lanternfish, and cod), crustaceans and cephalopods.

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### **Behaviour**

Analysis of stomach contents shows foraging occurs at dusk or early night. They perform a variety of aerial behaviours such as breaching, chin slaps, and a unique behaviour termed “roto-tailing” in which they make high arching jumps while rapidly rotating their tail. Not commonly observed bow-riding. Around the UK, sightings of single individuals, mixed groups with common dolphins or school sizes range from 10-30. Elsewhere, group size may number hundreds or even thousands. When swimming at speed, up to one-third of all members of a school will be above the surface at any one time. Three major types of school are recognised: juvenile, adult and

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mixed. Adult and mixed are further divided into breeding and non-breeding schools. There is some evidence of segregation of sexes outside of the breeding season, especially around the British Isles, where strandings are predominantly male. They are thought to be capable of making foraging dives to depths of 200-700m.

## Life History

Sexual maturity is reached between 7-15 years in males, 6-18 years in females. The gestation period lasts an estimated 12-13 months. The calving interval is between 2-4 years. Juvenile and adult survival rates are unknown. Weaning may not be completed until well into the second year, although animals have been seen eating solid foods after just 3 months. The breeding season is extended and probably variable. It is between July and October in the Mediterranean, and April to May in the Northeast Atlantic. Calves remain in adult schools until one or two years after weaning and then leave to join juvenile schools. The breeding system is thought to be polygynous. The life span is anywhere from 30-35 years with a maximum of 58 years.

## Conservation Threats

In shelf waters of the NE Atlantic, the main threat has been from fisheries by-catch (formerly purse seines and driftnets, now mainly pelagic trawls). Other potential threats include prey depletion and physiological responses to high contaminant levels. A mass mortality due to morbillivirus occurred in the Mediterranean Sea in 1990-92. In other parts of the world, the striped dolphin is hunted in harpoon and drive fisheries (e.g. Japan), and has been taken occasionally in the Mediterranean. The species is legally protected in European, British and Irish waters.

**IUCN status:** Least Concern.

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