



SPECIES FACT SHEET –

Fraser's Dolphin
(Lagenodelphis hosei)



Photo © Christopher Swann

Measurements

Length

Newborn: 0.9-1.1 m

Full grown: 2.2-2.7 m

Weight

Newborn: 20 kg

Full grown: Up to c. 210 kg

Identification

At Sea

Small, stocky dolphin with short, distinct beak. Small flippers and dorsal fin. Usually seen in groups leaping clear of water, and showing their dark grey to black back, grey flanks and white to pink belly. Broad, dark stripes from eye to genital region and sometimes from beak to flippers.

On Land

Very robust body, sloping forehead and short beak, centrally placed small fin. Deep palatal grooves, 34-44 teeth in each jaw.

Description

Head

It has a very short beak (c. 3-6 cm) with a sloping forehead. There are 34-44 pointed teeth in each jaw with deep palatal grooves. The skull structure shows close similarity to common dolphin, spinner dolphin, and striped dolphin.

Body, Fin & Markings

It has a small, robust body, with a small pointed (triangular or slightly recurved) dorsal fin placed centrally on its back, and small flippers. Its colouration is variable with a grey-brown back and appendages, pale grey flanks with a whitish or pinkish belly. It has a thick dark stripe running from eye to genital area giving the appearance of a mask. Occasionally another dark thick stripe is present from beak to flipper. Both stripes may be light or absent. The post-anal hump is absent or slight in females and young, but is very distinct in males.

Distribution

Global Distribution

Not well known (first described in 1956). It has worldwide distribution in tropical pelagic waters with rare movements into temperate coastal waters (South Australia, Uruguay, British Isles, France).

European Waters

There have been live sightings in the Azores and Canaries. The first sighting in European waters was a mass stranding of 11 individuals on the north Brittany coast in 1984.

UK & Ireland

There has been only one confirmed record in British waters - a single male stranded on South Uist, Outer Hebrides, Scotland in 1996.

Abundance

The abundance of Fraser's dolphins is not known. They are thought to be not uncommon in the Caribbean Sea. Populations in Japan and Philippines differ morphologically.

Habitat

Fraser's dolphins are typically found in open oceans, particularly warm equatorial waters. Their depth preference appears to be c. 500-5,000 m although they can occur in shallower waters adjacent to the continental shelf.

Diet

Strandings on the Brittany coast had fed on blue whiting, *Trisopterus* spp., whiting, and cuttlefish *Sepia* spp. Elsewhere, they feed on mesopelagic fishes (Myctophidae and Chauliodontidae), shrimps (Oplophoridae), and squid.

Behaviour

Most schools observed comprise c. 100-1,000 individuals, but smaller groups of 4-15 have been recorded. Schools swim tightly and fast moving (>20 km/h) with individuals porpoising. They may approach boats and bow-ride but are also known to actively avoid boats. Breaches are common. They are often associated with other cetaceans, particularly melon-headed whales.

Life History

Males reach sexual maturity at 7-10 years and females at 5- 8 years. Mating is presumed to be promiscuous with a gestation period of 12.5 months. Based upon limited data, breeding appears to be mainly in summer. The calving interval is approximately two years. The oldest recorded individual was 19 years old, but this is based upon limited data so the life span could be greater.

Conservation Threats

Fraser's dolphins are frequently caught in drive nets in Japan and by harpoon in the Lesser Antilles, Indonesia, the Philippines and Ghana. Incidental catch is also common in purse seines in the eastern tropical Pacific and the Philippines, trap nets in Japan, gill nets in South Africa and Sri Lanka, anti-shark nets in South Africa, and in drift nets in the Philippines. The species is legally protected in European, British and Irish waters.

IUCN status: Least Concern.

References

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