

Dying to Entertain You? You decide...

Whale and Dolphin Shows and Interaction Programmes

WDCS **Stop-Captivity Campaign: Why are we concerned about the capture, trade and confinement of dolphins in captivity? What does WDCS do to stop it and how can you help?**

WDCS understands why so many people love dolphins and why many want to see them first hand. We appreciate that, often, for guaranteed sightings the simplest option for a family is to visit a dolphinarium. However, we ask that anyone that has been to or is thinking of going to see or interact with dolphins in captivity to consider the following information. This will help you make an informed decision and show you how you can help WDCS to protect cetaceans.

WDCS campaigns against the capture, trade and confinement of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) because we believe it is inherently cruel to restrict such social, intelligent and wide-ranging animals in captivity, where their physical, social and mental needs cannot be met. Captivity threatens the welfare and conservation of cetaceans.

Further information can be found at www.wdcs.org/captivity.

In captivity, many trainers want the best for the animals in their care. However, in spite of their best efforts, cetaceans fare poorly in confinement. Furthermore, there is a moral debate associated with this issue that is backed up by recent research on dolphin intelligence. In his book 'In Defense of Dolphins, the New Moral Frontier', Thomas I. White concludes that dolphins should be regarded and treated as 'non-human persons'.

Most whales and dolphins are naturally gregarious, have naturally 'smiling' features and are able to learn 'tricks'. Ironically this makes them desirable for public display. However, the more we learn about them as individuals and their lives in populations and at the species level, the more it raises the ethical question of whether they should be trapped in, what would be to us, a prison cell.

In the wild, whales and dolphins...

- Have **large home ranges** (e.g. orcas can dive as deep as 60m and travel as far as 160km in a day and bottlenose dolphins off the coast of Cornwall, UK, have been recorded travelling up to 1076km in 20 days¹).
- Are almost **always in motion**, even when resting and spend less than 20% of their time at the water's surface.
- Orcas and Dall's porpoise are two of the **fastest animals** in the sea (Dall's porpoises can reach swimming speeds of up to 35mph).
- Live in **highly complex societies**; with some individuals holding key roles within a specific group (e.g. communicator with other pods, nursing).
- **Choose** to form strong, long-lasting **social bonds** with certain other members of their pod.
- Are **intelligent** and can demonstrate problem solving and abstract concept formation, e.g.. utilise tools - female bottlenose dolphins in Australia have learned to use natural sponges to protect their beaks while foraging among sea urchins on the sea bed.
- Are **altruistic**, some species have been witnessed helping other members of their pod, other species and even humans in trouble. They are **self-aware** and display highly responsive behaviour.

¹ Wood, C.J. 1998. Movement of bottlenose dolphins around the south-west coast of Britain. Journal of Zoology Vol. 246 Issue 2

- Have **culture** i.e. they teach and learn traditions (e.g. Patagonian orcas partially strand themselves to catch sea-lions).
- Demonstrate a high degree of vocal adaptability e.g. orcas in different parts of the world have completely **different** dialects from one another.
- For more information on wild cetaceans visit www.wdcs.org

Of the wild dolphins of the Moray Firth, WDCS Field Officer, Charlie Philips notes:

“Our dolphins can quite easily travel up to 60 kilometres in one day. They almost never stop moving and can reach speeds of up to 20mph. Long-lasting friendships between dolphins can stretch over decades and mothers teach their calves about hunting, ships, other species, and about where they live. They also demonstrate interesting means of catching big, powerful salmon, using the fast tidal currents and the seabed geography to make it easier to trap, kill and then swallow these big fish. One of our dolphins, Kesslet, even skins her fish before she eats it!”



“No aquarium, no tank in a marine land, however spacious it may be, can begin to duplicate the conditions of the sea. And no dolphin who inhabits one of those aquariums or one of those marine lands can be considered normal”.

Jacques Yves Cousteau

The Problems of Captivity

There are over 200 known dolphinariums worldwide², holding a variety of species, including bottlenose dolphins, orcas, false killers whales, Risso’s, Common and Amazon River dolphins and porpoises. Unfortunately, there is no central database or requirement to record births, deaths and transfer of animals, apart from in the US. Although conditions can vary between facilities, the bottom line for the dolphinarium industry is to make a profitable business from displaying these animals to the public.

Once confined, dolphins...

- Are separated from their natural habitat and enclosed in a totally alien environment.
- Have to undergo medication and fertility control.

² Aquatic Mammals 2005, 31 (3) lists 199 facilities worldwide. More have established since then.

- Have to put up with an artificial diet, unusual noise, strange odours and the proximity of people and other unfamiliar captive animals.
- No longer have free will to choose social bonds.
- May suffer aggression from other pool mates more dominant than them.
- Are sometimes kept on their own (some in hotel swimming pools), e.g. four orcas are currently held in captivity on their own.
- Suffer from stress, reduced life expectancy and breeding problems.
- The Marine Mammal Inventory Report, maintained by the U.S. government, lists a variety of causes of death including drowning, ingestion of foreign objects and aggression from pool mates.

The trouble with tanks:

- Any tank is small and cramped compared to the open ocean.
- Chemically-treated water effects dolphins' sensitive skin, causing ulcers and skin lesions.
- Chemically-treated water means no live fish or plants can be placed inside, leaving the tank bare and largely featureless, with no mental stimulation.
- Many countries do not have minimum standards for housing captive dolphins

The trouble with sea pens:

- Sea pens may be situated close to pollution sources such as sewage outfall pipes.
- Sea pens may be in very shallow water, where water becomes very hot in the sun, especially where no shade is provided for the animals.
- Man-made noise from boats and coastal development can be a constant disturbance.
- Some sea pens are built in hurricane zones. For example, Hurricane's Katrina and Wilma completely destroyed several dolphinariums, leading to the death and escape of several captive dolphins and displacing about 100 others³.
- The building of sea pens often leads to the destruction of coral reefs and other coastal habitats.
- Pollution from dolphin enclosures (including dolphin faeces) can have significant impacts on coral reefs. For instance, in Cozumel, Mexico, a few miles down the coast of an attraction a few kilometres of reef are overgrown by algae⁴.



³ The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity (3rd Edition), 2006. A report for The Humane Society of the United States and the World Society for the Protection of Animals by Naomi Rose and Richard Farinato.

⁴ Dolphin Enclosures and Algae Distributions at Chankanaab, Cozumel: Observations and Recommendations by Thomas J. Goreau, Ph.D. President, Global Coral Reef Alliance June 2003
<http://globalcoral.org/Dolphin%20enclosures%20and%20algae%20distributions%20at%20Chankanaab.%20Co.htm>

Capture and Trade

The global trade in dolphins is not over. Captures from the wild continue to occur to meet supply and demand. The removal of individual dolphins from wild populations for display in captivity or for swimming with dolphin programmes in captive dolphin facilities may have serious implications for the survival of the populations targeted.

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature, (IUCN), considers the capture of wild cetaceans as a critical conservation issue and likens it to “*incidental or deliberate killing, as the animals brought into captivity (or killed during capture operations) are no longer available to help maintain their populations.*”
- The capture and removal of dolphins can be especially problematic because female dolphins are preferred for interaction programmes as they are considered less aggressive towards humans than male dolphins.
- Captures of wild dolphins for swimming with dolphins programmes take place with little or no consideration of the impacts these removals could have on wild populations, in spite of the requirement by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), that trade is supported by a non-detriment finding.

Current captures of dolphins from the wild include:

- **Japanese Drive Hunts:** The annual dolphin drive hunt kills around 2,000 dolphins each year. WDCS has exposed the fact that these hunts are being fuelled by the aquarium industry, which also takes dozens of animals alive from the hunts each year, mainly for Japanese aquariums. Some of these dolphins have now been exported to China, Turkey and Dubai.
- **Japanese orca captures:** Five orcas (the “Taiji Five”) were captured in Japanese waters in 1997, they are now all dead.
- **Solomon Islands:** In 2003 alone, over 100 bottlenose dolphins were captured from the waters around the Solomon Island, with 28 exported to Mexico. Captures in the last few years have also occurred in high numbers and led to exports to Dubai and the Philippines.
- **Caribbean:** Cuba has exported between 127 and 180 bottlenose dolphins since 1986.
- **Russia:** A female orca was captured from the wild in 2003, leaving her dead only a few weeks later and one other animal killed in the capture. Beluga whales continue to be captured from Russian waters and exported to aquariums in China and the Middle East. In the 1980s and 1990s, dozens of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins were captured in Russian waters for export overseas.
- **Turkey:** 23 bottlenose dolphins have been captured since 2006 from Turkish waters for shows and dolphin assisted therapy programmes.

Acclimatisation & Transportation

- After being removed from their natural environment and their families, dolphins are transported, often over long distances, to small enclosures which bear no resemblance to their open ocean home.
- Death rates of bottlenose dolphins increase by six times during and immediately after capture from the wild.
- A similar risk of death also occurs in dolphins whenever they are transported between facilities, suggesting that dolphins never acclimatise to transportation.

Breeding

- Dolphinarium and aquaria often present their marine mammal breeding programmes as conservation projects, but few endangered or threatened species are being bred in captivity and no reintroduction-to-the-wild research is being conducted, at least for whales and dolphins.
- Husbandry practices in many zoos, dolphinarium and aquaria separate offspring from their mothers long before they would be separated from each other in the wild. This may have resulted in captive-bred animals lacking essential survival and reproductive skills.

Swimming and Interacting with dolphins

Many dolphins captured in the wild end up in swimming with dolphins and other interaction programmes in captivity.

Risks to dolphins in these attractions:

- Dolphins cannot escape from human swimmers they don't want to interact with.
- Dolphins have been observed demonstrating signs of alarm when they are in close proximity to swimmers.
- Nails, jewellery and suntan creams can damage dolphins' delicate skin.
- Dolphins in petting pools are often obese and are at risk of injury from competitive pool mates and ingestion of foreign objects.
- Dolphins are often kept in unsafe, unsanitary and over-crowded conditions.

Furthermore, there are risks to the human participants:

- Dolphins are wild and unpredictable animals, even when well trained.
- There is the risk of disease transmission between humans and dolphins.
- People have been injured, sometimes seriously, swimming with dolphins.
- Many people report a feeling of disappointment after swimming with dolphins – the experience did not quite live up to their expectations.
- Many participants do not realise how large and strong these animals are and may feel afraid once they enter the water with them.
- Dolphin Assisted Therapy has not been demonstrated to have any long-term beneficial impact on those who have attended a programme and there are no official standards or enforceable guidelines relating to it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Aren't captive facilities needed for conservation and scientific research?

Fewer than 5% to 10% of zoos and aquaria are involved in substantial conservation programs. The amount spent on these programmes is a mere fraction of the income generated by the facilities. Simply exhibiting wildlife can not be considered as conservation⁵.

Knowledge gained on behaviour and health-related issues in the captive environment cannot be applied usefully to wild cetacean populations. Captive dolphins live in an artificial environment and may be subject to medication that alters their body chemistry. They also follow the same basic routine rather than the varied daily movements of a free-living cetacean. The majority of

⁵ The Case Against Marine Mammals in Captivity (3rd Edition), 2006. A report for The Humane Society of the United States and the World Society for the Protection of Animals by Naomi Rose and Richard Farinato.

research conducted on captive animals relates to improving husbandry practices, not to solving conservation problems.

Studies of free-living cetaceans are becoming more and more sophisticated, providing increasingly useful data for the conservation of cetaceans in the wild.

Whale and dolphin captures still occur routinely around the globe. Captures are very stressful and can result in the deaths of the individuals targeted.

Aren't captive facilities educational?

The primary justification for the public display of marine mammals is the educational benefit of these exhibits. Whale and dolphin displays significantly distort the public's understanding of the marine environment. Educational messages often take second place to the whale and dolphin performance, which are the main feature of dolphinariums. The tricks that are displayed are exaggerated variations of natural behaviours and do little to further the public's knowledge of cetaceans and their habitats.

In addition, the complex nature of the lives of whales and dolphins cannot possibly be illustrated with reference to animals in a tank. Educational materials offered by captive facilities often blatantly omit facts about a species' unique social structure and acoustic repertoire, as well as its remarkable extended families and natural tendency to range freely over vast areas. Visitors to captive facilities may be subject to mis-information, and leave with a distorted perception of cetaceans and their marine environments.

Isn't captivity safer than life in the wild?

Whales and dolphins have evolved over millions of years to live in the ocean; it is their natural habitat. The way to solve hunting, pollution and other threats is to tackle the point sources of these problems, not to take these animals out of the seas.

The idea that dolphins (or any wildlife) must be saved from the threats and challenges they face in the wild by being placed in artificial settings is a terrible conservation message. The fact is that while life IS tough for these animals in the open ocean, it is also complex, challenging, engrossing, and beautiful. It is never going to be a solution to the growing number of threats dolphins face to try to preserve them in the 'ark' of dolphinariums (and no legitimate zoological facilities promote the 'ark' theory for zoos and aquariums anymore either). If people think that captivity IS a solution to habitat threats the focus is then taken away from reducing the threats to wild dolphins. This potentially means that wild dolphins don't stand a chance of long-term survival! If people believe that it's better for dolphins to be in a cage rather than in the wide open ocean, this only emphasizes how dolphinariums miseducate the public.

Captive-born dolphins are happy in captivity, aren't they?

Another argument suggests that dolphins born in captivity are domesticated. However, dolphins are STILL wild animals, even if they have been kept in captivity for some time, even if they were born there.

Animals born in captivity are domesticated, so they're not wild anymore?

[Domestication is the modification of an animal over a significant number of generations through selective breeding in captivity. Certain characteristics are either enhanced or eliminated and the animals become adapted to a significant extent to a life intimately associated with man (i.e. dogs).

Whales and dolphins are wild animals. In captivity they may develop strong social bonds with their human trainers however this is correctly known as being socialized or habituated, not domesticated. Domestication happens over a very long period of evolutionary time, while an individual is habituated during its lifetime. Breeding in dolphinariums is rare, let alone breeding that occurs between individuals with the most docile personalities or smallest number or size of teeth. ***Dolphins are tamed, they are not domesticated.***

If dolphins breed in captivity they must be happy?

Some animals are artificially inseminated. One other point to note is that in human society, even at times of war or severe civil unrest, babies are still born.

Wouldn't dolphins in "open" sea pens escape if they were not happy?

This can be addressed on two different levels: Dolphins that have been taken from the wild have been removed from their social group and natural habitat. Finding themselves in an alien environment far from their natural home, these animals may fear venturing out into an unknown sea, away from the facility that provides them with food. Young animals are often selected who may not have learnt all the skills needed to survive in the wild. The captives are also habituated to human company – this does not mean to say that they are happy.

It is also important to remember that these individual dolphins have been conditioned. If you have been to a show- have you ever noticed that the performing animals are fed fish each time they complete a routine or a trick? They may be performing so that they receive fish or other rewards.

Dolphin's smile, so they must be happy...

Dolphins have a natural smile. They are born this way (i.e. it's physiological). Similarly, they do not frown when upset, distressed or angry.

Marine biologists study the behaviour of dolphins, using an ethogram (a known repertoire of behaviours used for particular purposes e.g. tail slapping is known to be a warning). It is by studying the behaviour of an animal that we can begin to tell how it may be feeling. Dolphins or whales that swim listlessly around their tanks, using the same route are showing *stereotypical* behaviour. This is similar to when you see polar bears or elephants rocking back and forth in a zoo. These animals may be suffering a great deal of mental distress.

Aren't whales and dolphins happy if they do tricks and eat fish?

This is a commonly used argument – that if the dolphins were unhappy they would not 'work' or would refuse to eat. It is true that some dolphins survive better than others, much like humans do in difficult circumstances. Some dolphins will just get on with their training and shows – what else is there for them to do in these boring bare tanks?

The Captivity Team's role

WDCS' anti-captivity campaign works across the globe on many different levels:

On a local level – WDCS works with grassroots campaigners to provide advice, expertise and material for people to raise concerns about dolphinaria in their own country.

On a national level – WDCS directly advises governments all over the world on issues relating to capture, trade and animal welfare. We also help governments to establish better legislation. WDCS also works with other stakeholders such as the tourism industry, in order to reach our goal of ending wild captures and improving the welfare of those animals already in captivity

On an international level – the WDCS captivity team advises and campaigns for better protection by working in international fora such as CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

What is WDCS calling for?

- An end to all wild capture and trade of all whales and dolphins.

- Better national and international legislation to protect whales and dolphins from the welfare and conservation risks presented by captivity.
- Phasing out of bad practice by working with the tourism industry and others.

Ultimately, WDCS wants to see an END to the keeping of cetaceans in captivity

There are many ways that you can help us too...

- Don't visit facilities that hold whales and dolphins in captivity.
- Support eco tourism instead e.g. land-based watching, a responsible boat trip or try Out of the Blue - <http://www.oceansworldwide.co.uk/>
- Spread the word and talk to others about the plight of dolphins in captivity.
- Tell WDCS if you are aware of any potential plans to capture animals or set up/ expand a dolphinarium.
- Write to your tour operator to express your concern for captive whales and dolphins.
- Report any facility that you are not satisfied with to WDCS.
- Write to your local and national government asking for better legislation for whales and dolphins – see www.wdcs.org/captivity
- Fundraise for WDCS and/or become a member or adopt a wild whale/dolphin with WDCS to help us to continue our work.

Go to www.wdcs.org/captivity for more information and current campaigns.

"There is about as much educational benefit to be gained in studying dolphins in captivity as there would be studying mankind by only observing prisoners held in solitary confinement" Jacques Cousteau

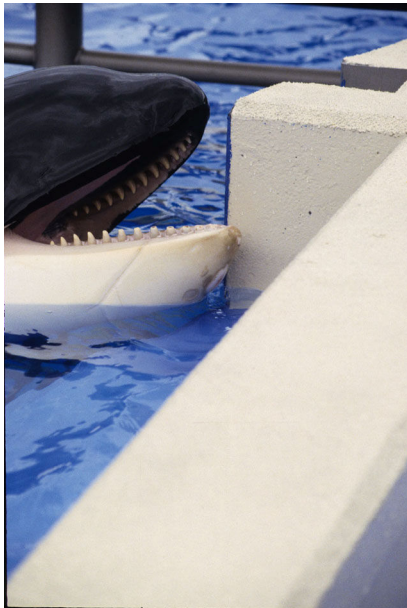


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