

# Bottlenose dolphins in captivity

We all love dolphins, and the captivity industry has capitalised on this to make huge profits at the expense of the animals misery.

**The bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) is the most commonly-held species of cetacean in captivity, followed by the killer whale or orca (*Orcinus orca*).**

It is also impossible to estimate how many dolphins world-wide have died during the traumatic capture process and from the shock and boredom of captivity. In the past, dolphinariums and marine parks have also tried to keep as many as 35 different species of cetacean, with little success, thus adding to the death toll.

There are currently hundreds of bottlenose dolphins in captivity world-wide: equally thousands have died in captivity. In the United States alone, according to figures from the US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), over 2,300 bottlenose dolphins were captured for display purposes between 1972 and 1994 in the USA. It is impossible to estimate how many dolphins have been captured for display in other countries. As an example of the death toll; in Germany at least 120 captive whales and dolphins have died since the 1960s. This figure will be significantly higher for the USA and other countries.

The natural intelligence of orcas and bottlenose dolphins have made them easy to train to do tricks and most people would have seen pictures of whales and dolphins jumping through hoops. These animals capture the public's imagination and are a powerful source of income for marine parks. However, whales and dolphins in captivity were, and still are, simply used predominantly for no other reason than public entertainment. In order to try and make it more acceptable to keep whales and dolphins, terms such as "education" and "scientific research" have been used by the dolphinarium and marine park industry as a justification for keeping and acquiring performing whales and dolphins.

There are no dolphinariums in Britain, something which WDCS is proud of. Many dolphinariums in the rest of the world are also coming under increasing pressure to change their exhibits and rehabilitate,

release or retire their animals. It is vital that this pressure is maintained. However, as some countries begin to react to this change in public attitude, others are just discovering that keeping whales and dolphins is just too tempting financially. Of particular concern is East Asia, China, Spain and Japan. Dolphinariums are also opening up in the Middle East. Working against captivity is a world-wide fight as dolphins and dolphin traders travel the world to keep this cruel business going.

## Bottlenose dolphins of the Black Sea

In the past decade, Black Sea dolphins have been appearing all over the world. They have been transported with very little care, to less than adequate holding facilities. There is a significant and uncontrolled trade going on that needs to be addressed. WDCS's

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report (see below) into this trade highlights the problems that exist.

In all, WDCS tracked 43 bottlenose dolphins exported from the Black Sea countries of Georgia, Russia and the Ukraine to foreign dolphinariums between 1990 and 1997. It is possible that other exports took place. There is documentary evidence that 20 of these are now dead, and 9 have been returned to Russia. The report follows each export and the fate of the individual animals.

What has become evident is that some of these



The captivity industry claims its programs are educational and scientific - does this look like "scientific research"?

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dolphins were Russian ex-military animals and some were 'wild-caught'. WDCS's particular concerns are that wild-caught dolphins are being passed off as ex-military animals that need to be relocated. One of the reasons given for the exports was that the Russian Navy could no longer afford to keep its military dolphin - which gave a convenient cover for a commercial trade.

The Black Sea bottlenose dolphin is facing enough threats to its wild habitat, without having to face the continued possibility of capture for a dolphinarium. The Black Sea is regarded as one of the most polluted marine environments in the world; as a consequence, much of its ecosystem is suffering. Fish stocks are depleted and many animals carry high pollution burdens. No one knows exact population figures for the Black Sea bottlenose dolphins. This is a species whose conservation and habitat requirements must be addressed - capturing individuals for captivity serves no conservation purpose.

When it was published the report attracted a considerable amount of attention and WDCS will continue to work to put a stop to this particular trade.

"The Dolphin Traders - An Investigation into the World-wide Trade and Export of Black Sea bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) from the Ukraine and Russia, 1990 - 1997". ■



Dolphins are taught tricks to entertain the crowds, with trainers often picking out "lucky" children to interact with.