

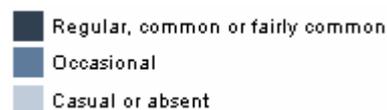


## THE ATLANTIC WHITE SIDED DOLPHIN IN UK WATERS



**DESCRIPTION** The Atlantic white-sided dolphin *Lagenorhynchus acutus* is a large and fairly robust dolphin, measuring 1.9 - 2.5 metres when fully-grown and weighing up to 230 kg. It is often confused with the white-beaked dolphin - the Atlantic white-sided dolphin can be distinguished by its smaller, slimmer, body, and by a white patch on the sides which runs into a yellowish streak just before the tail. It is very conspicuous at sea, being acrobatic, frequently breaching and tail slapping. A fast and powerful swimmer, it will occasionally swim alongside vessels, bow-riding in front of faster ships, as well as riding the waves created by larger whales. This species is one of those most frequently seen by people taking offshore pleasure boat trips.

**DISTRIBUTION** Atlantic white-sided dolphins favour the cool temperate and subarctic waters of the North Atlantic, and are rarely found south of the English Channel. In the summer, the white-sided dolphin is commonly sighted in the coastal waters of north-western and northern Scotland, and around the Faroes, Iceland and West Norway. It also occurs in the northern and central North Sea and along the west coast of Ireland. This is a similar pattern to that of the white-beaked dolphin, but white-sided dolphins tend to occur more offshore, particularly along the continental slope. Like many other smaller species of dolphin in these waters, they appear to move nearer shore in summer.



**SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR** White-sided dolphins have been observed in groups of six to thirty animals off the UK, but seem to commonly form large pods of up to one thousand individuals offshore. Within herds, there is a high ratio of females to males, and it is possible that some males form separate 'bachelor' herds. The dolphins are often seen in association with other cetaceans, such as white-beaked dolphins, killer whales and humpback whales, and may sometimes be seen feeding with them.

**REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY** The calving season is thought to be between May and August, with a peak between April and July in the British Isles, mating having taken place 11 months earlier. Calves measure between 1 and 1.3 metres at birth. The life span of the dolphins has been estimated at around 27 years. Individual and mass strandings are common in this species.

**DIET** White-sided dolphins favour herring, poor cod, Norway pout, scad, and squid, but they also take shrimp, silver hake, argentine, and mackerel. They appear to feed co-operatively, with groups of dolphins herding fish against the surface of the water.



**THREATS** The white-sided dolphin is still hunted in small numbers in certain areas, such as the Faroes and Greenland. Living generally offshore in deep waters, it is not exposed to pollution or human disturbance from vessels to the extent that coastal species can be, but it is sometimes entangled in fishing-gear.



#### FURTHER READING

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Reeves, R.R., Smeenk, C., Brownell, R.L. Jr, and Kiuze, C.C. 1999. Atlantic White-sided Dolphin - *Lagenorhynchus acutus* (Gray, 1828). Pp. 31-56. In: *Handbook of Marine Mammals. Volume 6: The Second Book of Dolphins and the Porpoises* (Eds. S.H. Ridgway and R. Harrison). Academic Press, San Diego. 486pp.

Reid, J., Evans, P.G.H. and Northridge, S.P. 2003. *Cetacean Distribution Atlas*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough. 68pp.