



## STRIPED DOLPHIN IN UK WATERS



**DESCRIPTION** The striped or euphrosyne dolphin, *Stenella coeruleoalba* is one of two long -beaked species found in our waters, the other being the common dolphin. The striped dolphin reaches 2.5-2.6m (averaging around 2.2-2.3m) in length, the males being slightly larger. They have a tapering forehead with a distinct crease separating the black beak from the forehead. The dorsal fin is centrally-placed and, sickle-shaped or erect. They have a distinctive white or light grey V-shape from above and behind the eye with one finger narrowing to a point below the fin, and the lower one extending towards the tail. Two black lines on the flanks, one from near eye to anus, and a second from eye to flippers are also very distinctive.



Regular, common or fairly common  
 Occasional  
 Casual or absent

**DISTRIBUTION** The striped dolphin is commonest small cetacean in the Mediterranean and is also seen off the Atlantic seaboard of France and the Iberian Peninsula. It has a worldwide distribution in tropical, subtropical and warm temperate seas in both hemispheres. In Britain and Ireland, it is rare, seen occasionally off the Atlantic coasts north to Scotland. It is recorded in all months of the year, but in coastal UK waters, mainly between July and December.



**SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR** Striped dolphins are generally seen in schools of 5-300, with schools of several thousand seen on occasions. They tend to be active and highly conspicuous, frequently breaching and capable of amazing acrobatics, including back somersaults, tail-spins, and upside-down porpoising. 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 mixed. Adult and mixed are further divided into breeding and non-breeding schools.





**REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY** They reach sexual maturity at between 5-6 (possibly 9) years, at a length of 1.8-1.9m. There is little difference between the sexes as to at what age they first reproduce. In the western north Pacific the striped dolphin seems to have a prolonged breeding season, with peaks in mating activity in winter, spring and possibly late summer. Gestation lasts for about 12 months. Weaning may not be completed until well into the second year, though animals have been seen eating solid foods after just 3 months. Females probably have a single calf every 3 years. Calves remain in adult schools until one or two years after weaning and then leave to join juvenile schools

**DIET** The genera *Delphinus* and *Stenella* are wide ranging in most warm temperate to tropical regions and therefore not surprisingly they are very opportunistic feeders with very variable diets depending on the region and season. Their diet consists of fish (for example, *Diaphus*, *Erythrocles*, *Micromesistius*, *Trisopterus*, *Gadiculus*, etc.), crustaceans and cephalopods. Shrimps in particular appear to be an important prey item.



**THREATS** In 1990, an outbreak of the morbillivirus infection led to the deaths of at least 750 striped dolphins in the Mediterranean. These same animals were also found to be heavily infested by parasites and have high levels of pollution in their system which could have resulted in a low resistance to the parasites and the infection.



Between 1976 and 1987 striped dolphins were one of the major components of some 219,537 small cetaceans killed by the Japanese. The killing of striped dolphins still goes on in Japan but on a much smaller scale. Striped dolphins are also victims of by-catches especially by gill nets in the Mediterranean. Figures are unknown.

They also seem to be particularly susceptible to heavy metal pollution with the highest levels of mercury recorded for any cetacean found in striped dolphins from the Mediterranean coast of France at 1,544ppm. The highest cadmium levels recorded in dolphins in the UK were 8.4 and 11ppm also found in two striped dolphins stranded in west Wales.

### FURTHER READING

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