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## **Bottlenose Dolphins**

Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are part of the family Delphinidae. This is the largest and most diverse family of cetaceans. It contains 26 species of dolphins and six toothed whales. This family is subdivided into two groups for identification purposes; those with a prominent beak and those without prominent beaks.

The Bottlenose dolphin has a very prominent beak, hence the name bottlenose dolphin. Though the animal is named, bottlenose, it does not have a nose. They have a blow hole to breath, like all cetaceans.

They dive for about three to four minutes inshore but sometimes longer offshore. They have been recorded holding their breath for up to fifteen minutes. A reason for diving for longer times is to forage for food. A typical diet for a bottlenose dolphin includes fish and squid, along with an occasional crustacean. They have about 40 to 52 teeth on the top jaw and 36 to 48 teeth on the bottom jaw. The teeth are conical in shape for grabbing. Dolphins do not chew their food, they swallow it whole, head first.

These animals are widely distributed in cold water to tropical seas worldwide. Some scientists believe there are two subgroups of these animals, an inshore and an offshore animal. The inshore form is a smaller animal, while the offshore animal is larger, and more robust. Distinguishing these two types of animals is an example of current research being conducted. There are bottlenose dolphins in enclosed seas such as the Black, Red and Mediterranean Seas, though in small numbers. Group size range from about ten, along the coast, up to 500 in the open water. Typically, they are seen in groups of about 25 in open waters.

These animals are highly active at the surface. They can be seen bow riding (swimming in front of the boat), body surfing on waves, breaching, spy hopping, and fluke waving. They are powerful swimmers.

A newborn calf can weigh between 35 to 65 pounds. A full grown dolphin ranges in weight from 330 to 1,435 pounds. The newborn is about 34 inches in length. Adults range from six feet to twelve feet in length. They have a stream-line body shape., with its dorsal fin in the center of its back. They are grey in color, ranging from light grey to a dark grey. Coloration depends on where they live in the world and whether they are inshore or offshore animals. They have counter shading, a light underside and darker top side. This provides protection against predators. They are not only hunted by sharks and killer whales, but are subject to entanglement in fishing nets, pollution, human disturbance, and habitat destruction.