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Dramatic Dall's Porpoise

This unique marked, black and white porpoise was named after the American naturalist W. H. Dall, who collected the first specimen of the type, which is now on display in the U.S. National Museum.

This porpoise is a very stocky animal, with small fins. Its head is very small and rounded.

Dall's porpoises are colored in black and white, with each animal having its own unique pattern. Most are black on the upper portions of the body, with large, oval-shaped white markings on the sides, and white bellies. A band of white borders the flukes and the dorsal fin that is white with markings in varying shapes.

The dorsal fin is slightly forward of the center of the body and triangular in shape. The flippers are very small and rounded at the tips. Their flukes are small and pointed at the tips with a small center notch.

This cetacean is small with a length ranging between 1.7 m to 2.29 m and weighing between 123 kg to 160 kg for both males and females. Its length is equal to the height of human males.

Now imagine being the size you are and giving birth to a 36", 50 pound baby. A calf's length is about 1 m at birth and weighs about 25 kg. Calves may nurse for up to two years. Calving takes place primarily in summer, although the U.S.A. coastal populations have been documented year round. Gestation is about 10 to 12 months.

Sexual maturity is reached at about eight years for males and seven years for females. The average life expectancy for a Dall's porpoise in the wild is about 20 years.

Dall's porpoises are found in the North Pacific from Baja California continuing up north through Alaska and in the Bering Sea and across into Japanese waters. They prefer water that is a temperature of less than 60 degrees F. These animals are year round residents and have little to no migratory patterns.

The diet of these porpoises is dependant on the waters in which they live in. Some pods eat squid, while others feed on schooling fishes like capelin, sardines, and herrings. They also feed on hake, deep-sea smelt and lantern fish. They average about 12 to 13 kg of food a day and are observed feeding mostly at night. That is like eating 96 McDonald's Quarter Pounders for dinner.

Dall's porpoises are seen traveling in small groups of 10 to 20, but as many as 200 may congregate while engaged in feeding. They can often be seen in the company of Pacific white-sided dolphins or pilot whales. They also enjoy bow riding and have been clocked at speeds of over 30 mph.

The population of Dall's porpoises are quite numerous but an actual population estimate is currently unavailable. These animals are hunted in Japan during a 2-month fishing season and 10,000 animals can be taken yearly. Other threats that these cetaceans must overcome include net entanglement (monofilament, plastic and nylon) and human encounters.