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Spectacular Spinners

The three or more shades of grey begins dark at the dorsal and gradually lightens to the white underside. The snout protrudes from the head almost like that of a great blue heron beak. The small size and slender form is well suited for its fighter jet like abilities.

Adults range from about 5 to 7 feet in length. That is much smaller than bottlenose dolphins which range from 6 to 12 feet.

Spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*) are an amazing animal to watch. I was able to volunteer with Harley for only a few hours and was fascinated with the appearance and the behaviors of this graceful mammal. Unfortunately, I did not get to observe the spectacular behaviors that spinner dolphins are known for.

The name "spinner" comes from their ability to suspend in the air at over 9 feet and spin as many as seven times before re-entering the water.

Spinner dolphins tend to feed at night and rest during the daylight hours. They eat squid and fish.

While each sub species has a limited range, spinner dolphins as a whole live in tropical and subtropical regions around the world, including in the Gulf of Mexico. For the geography buffs, that equals 40°N to 40°S.

Swimming with tuna has caused problems with entanglement in tuna purse seines. Although the current population has yet to be determined, it is estimated that 15,000 are killed by either gillnets or harpooning.

As a social animal, spinner dolphins will travel in pods or herds ranging in number from less than 50 to as many as thousands. Boaters may see foam created from the water being agitated as these dolphins swim together.

The attraction to these unique animals has resulted in a number of studies. Three of such studies are published in Volume 19 alone of Marine Mammal Science. This is a journal by the Society for Marine Mammalogy. The studies include feeding ecology, sexual ecology and directionality in the whistles.

Not much is known about rehabilitating spinner dolphins. What is known is that like spotted dolphins, spinner dolphins stress easily. This means that the rapid responses needed to care for an ill animal must be done quietly and calmly, so as not to cause heart failure or other complications. A difficult task. Most all other information is gained on the spot and compiled to share.