

SPOTTED DOLPHINS



The **pan tropical spotted dolphin** (*Stenella attenuata*) is a species of dolphin found in all the world's temperate and tropical oceans. The species was beginning to come under threat due to the killing of millions of individuals in tuna purse seines. In the 1980s, the rise of "dolphin-friendly" tuna capture methods saved millions of the species in the eastern Pacific Ocean and it is now one of the most abundant dolphin species in the world. The species was first described by John Gray in 1846. Gray's initial analysis included the Atlantic spotted dolphin in this species. They are now regarded as separate. Both the genus and specific names come from Latin words meaning thin or thinning.

Interesting Facts:

- The pan tropical spotted dolphin varies significantly in size and coloration throughout its range.
- Spots are key defining characteristics in adults, though immature individuals are generally uniformly colored and susceptible to confusion with the bottlenose dolphin.
- Populations around the Gulf of Mexico may be relatively spot-free even in adulthood. In the Atlantic, confusion is possible with the Atlantic spotted dolphin.
- the dolphin has a long, thin beak. The upper and lower jaws are darkly colored, but are separated by thin, white "lips". The chin, throat, and belly are white to pale grey with a limited number of spots.
- The flanks are separated into three distinct bands of color — the lightest at the bottom, followed by a thin, grey strip in the middle of the flank, and a dark-grey back.
- The pan tropical spotted dolphin is very active and is prone to making large, splashy leaps from the sea. It is a common breacher and will often clear the water for a second or more. Bow-riding and other play with boats is common.
- They are often found swimming with yellowfin tuna (hence the problem with dolphin deaths caused by tuna fishing).
- However, they do not feed on that fish. In fact, the two species have similar diets of small epipelagic fish. In other areas, the species may also feed on squid and crustaceans.
- Birth length is 80-90 cm. Adults are about 2.5 m long and weigh 120 kg. Sexual maturity is reached at 10 years in females and 12 years in males. The average lifespan is around 40 years.
- The pan tropical spotted dolphin, as its name implies, is found across all tropical and subtropical waters around the world — roughly speaking all oceans and seas between 40°N and 40°S.
- The total world population is in excess of three million — the second-most abundant cetacean after the bottlenose dolphin — of which two million is found in the eastern Pacific.
- the pan tropical spotted dolphin is covered by the *Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Conservation of the Manatee and Small Cetaceans of Western Africa and Macaronesia* (Western African Aquatic Mammals MoU) and the *Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and Their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region* (Pacific Cetaceans MoU).