



OUR DOLPHINS

If you visit Port Stephens at any time of the year, you will most likely be treated to a privileged view inside the world of the bottlenose dolphin.

Around 90 to 120 Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins live permanently in the waters of Port Stephens-Great Lakes Marine Park and this is one of the most popular locations in Australia for dolphin watching.

This area's first people, The Worimi, are spiritually connected to dolphins (or "guparr" in the Gathang language.) Traditionally, elders would speak with dolphins about food sources and about looking after each other and even today, this is the case with some elders.

Living as they do, in a saline environment, dolphins do not actually drink and despite their habitat they live as many desert animals do, with no direct source of drinking water. Their food (fish and squid) provides them indirectly with water.

Dolphins cannot sleep as we do. They must remain awake so as to surface and breathe regularly and usually do this at intervals of between 30 seconds and 30 minutes. They do, however, close down one half of their brain at a time and "sleep" in this way for up to 8 hours a day.

They can live for up to 30 or 40 years but the average life span is around 17 years.

Most calves are born in the summer months, usually between December and March, after a one year gestation period, and being mammals they suckle their young.

Dolphins communicate through sound waves and hear ten times better than we do. Sound waves travel through the water and then through the lower jaw to the inner ear. Their sense of smell is poor.

Dolphins form strong bonds within the pod. They hunt by working in a team to surround a school of fish. In turn they will then plough through the school, eating as many as they can.



Barbara Lyle Photograph



Dolphins are related to terrestrial animals and the fact that they need to surface-breathe is the most telling indication.

The bottlenose dolphins of Shark Bay in W.A. have been extensively studied and one amazing finding is that they are capable of tool use.

Although it has long been known that these animals are highly intelligent adaptable predators and capable of problem-solving, there is a surprising but well-documented instance of one carrying a sponge in its beak to protect itself against the spines of sea urchins when foraging in the bottom sediments.



Tea Gardens Visitor Centre
245 Myall Street
02 4997 0111
www.teagardens.nsw.au
teagardensvic@gmail.com

One of the most well-known and loved dolphins in Port Stephens is a female dolphin called Nicky. Nicky has a distinctive dorsal fin and is regularly sighted on dolphin watch cruises. She was first seen in December 1998 with a calf. Since then she has had a number of offspring. Nicky is often sighted in the eastern section of the port.

Eddy is another well-known dolphin who is often sighted in the eastern part of Port Stephens. Eddy likes to follow boats and was first recognised in the Shoal Bay area in December 1998.

Flopper is well-known dolphin who has a distinctive floppy fin. He/she (we are not sure which gender) **is often seen in the western sections of Port Stephens** and was first sighted in February 2005 with his/her mother. Since then, Flopper has had an eventful life .



If you travel to Soldiers Point, keep an eye out for four local stars.

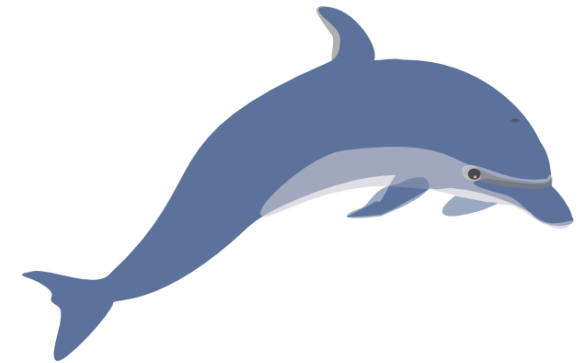
‘The Beatles’ are a group of dolphins often sighted here; all four dolphins – John, Paul, Ringo and George – have distinctive fins and are an example of a male alliance.

Many of Port Stephens’ bottlenose dolphins have distinct marks, cuts, scars or notches in their fins, enabling researchers and dolphin watchers to recognise individuals in the pod. See if you can spot one of these commonly sighted dolphins during your visit.

THE ANNUAL DOLPHIN CENSUS

On a designated day every year, around 100 volunteers from Hawks Nest –Tea Gardens as well as from Nelson Bay and other parts of the Port Stephens area, assist National Parks (now called The Department of Environment and Climate Change) in the annual Dolphin Watch Census.

Specific sites on land and water are allocated to volunteers who all observe their areas of a waterway simultaneously for a designated half hour. Dugongs and penguins are also recorded if seen. National Parks conveys the final count and locations to all volunteers after these have been collated.



WHERE TO SEE DOLPHINS

- ⇒ From the “Singing Bridge”. Early mornings and later in the afternoons are the best times.
- ⇒ From the cycleway/walkway beside the river in Tea Gardens.
- ⇒ From “The Anchorage” in Hawks Nest along the river.
- ⇒ From the Boulders on the far eastern end of Jimmys Beach near to Yacaaba.
- ⇒ From the picnic table at “Hole in the Wall” in the National Park along Mungo Brush Road. This location sometimes has big numbers surfing the waves.
- ⇒ From a ferry or a Dolphin Watch cruise on Port Stephens or on the river

Ask at the visitors centre for a map of Hawks Nest-Tea Gardens and one of the National Park if you intend to visit Hole in the Wall.