



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Atlantic Spotted Dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*)

Description

Atlantic spotted dolphins have a robust or chunky body with a tall curved dorsal fin. They have three-part coloration with dark gray back, lighter sides, and a white belly. Their color and spot pattern varies with age, lifestage, and geographic location. Their swimming behavior is quite acrobatic with frequent jumping and bowriding.

Habitat and Distribution

Atlantic spotted dolphins occur in tropical to warm temperate waters along the continental shelf of the Atlantic. They have a widespread distribution that ranges from the U.S. East Coast (Gulf of Mexico to Cape Cod, MA), the Azores and Canary Islands, to Gabon, and Brazil.

Sounds

Atlantic spotted dolphins make many different vocalizations including contact calls known as 'signature whistles', squawks, screams, growls, squeals, and barks. Spotted dolphins whistle and chirp while socializing and playing. They also use echolocation clicks to locate prey while foraging.

Feeding

Atlantic spotted dolphins feed on small fish, cephalopods, and benthic invertebrates by grasping prey with their cone-shaped teeth.

Threats

Atlantic spotted dolphins have been accidentally killed in gillnets and purse seines. Individuals are occasionally harpooned for food and bait in the Caribbean, Brazil, and West Africa.

Fun Fact

Calves are born without spots and begin to develop dark spots on their belly around the time that they are weaned. Individuals become darker and more heavily spotted with age.



Family: Delphinidae
Population: >50,000
Status: Data Deficient
Length: 5 – 7.5 feet
Weight: 220 – 315 lbs