

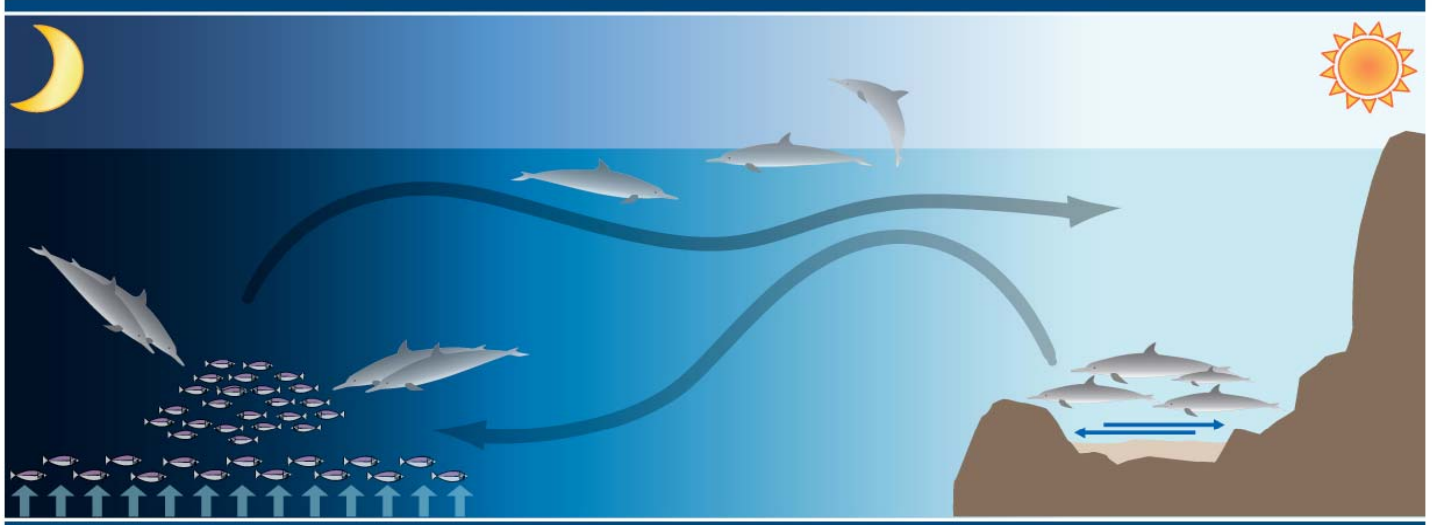


WILD DOLPHIN BEHAVIORS

WHAT ARE NATURAL BEHAVIORS?

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WILD HAWAIIAN SPINNER DOLPHIN

Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
www.pifsc.noaa.gov



FORAGING

Hawaiian spinner dolphins feed on fish, shrimp, and squid that, during the day, remain deep in the ocean but migrate to the surface (upper 200 m) at night. Spinner dolphins hunt cooperatively at night when their prey are closer to the surface.

SOCIAL TRANSITION

As spinner dolphins transition between rest and foraging, they typically display the leaps and spins for which their common name was given. They also socialize with each other during this transition.

RESTING

During the day, spinner dolphins move into shallow coastal waters to rest and socialize. Resting areas are usually wind protected, typically < 50 m in depth, and have sandy bottoms. Resting dolphins move slowly back and forth in tight groups, spending most of their time below the surface.

Spinner dolphins exhibit a variety of natural behaviors, which are essential for survival and success in dolphin communities. The following behaviors are commonly seen in Hawaiian waters.

Resting



Resting is characterized by slow swimming speed, synchronous dives and extended periods swimming in quiet formation along the shallow bottom

Traveling



Travel is characterized by persistent movement in a consistent direction. Dolphins may travel alone or in groups.

Socializing



Social interactions involve breeding, playing, aggression, and gentle body contact, such as rubbing.

Aerial Behaviors

Aerial behaviors include those behaviors from which this dolphin received its name. Many of these behaviors bring the dolphin partially or completely out of the water with significant splash. Aerial behaviors include nose-outs, tail slaps, back slaps, side slaps, head slaps, arcuate leaps, tail-over-head leaps, and spins.



Leap



Side slap



Arcuate leap



Spin



WHAT IS DISTURBANCE?

Disturbance occurs when an animal's natural behaviors are disrupted. Chronic disturbance may lead to long-term negative impacts, such as compromised health, stress, injury, reduced reproductive success, and displacement from, or avoidance of, important habitats.

Some natural behaviors are more vulnerable to disturbance than others, such as feeding and resting. Maternal care is also particularly vulnerable to disturbance — extra care should be taken while viewing dolphin mothers and calves.

WHAT CAUSES DISTURBANCE?

Wild dolphins can be easily disturbed by the presence of people and watercraft, especially when approached too closely, quickly, or noisily for short or extended durations. Too many vessels approaching at the same time or in sequence can also cause disturbance.

WHAT ARE SIGNS OF DISTURBANCE?

Any abrupt change to natural behaviors constitutes disturbance. The following are additional signs of disturbance:

- ◇ Rapid or abrupt changes in swimming direction or speed, including underwater course change
- ◇ Erratic swimming patterns.
- ◇ Escape tactics such as prolonged diving, underwater exhalation, underwater course changes, or rapid swimming away from your location at the surface.
- ◇ Female attempting to shield calf with her body or by her movements.
- ◇ Sudden stop in important breeding, nursing, feeding or resting activities after your arrival
- ◇ Increased occurrence of aerial behaviors including spins, leaps, head slaps, body slaps, and tail slaps, particularly during normal resting periods



Rapid swimming at surface away from vessel(s).



Repeated head slap



Repeated tail slap



Increased occurrence of aerial behaviors

TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING VIEWING WHILE MINIMIZING DISTURBANCE

- 1) Follow the National Marine Fisheries Service's Pacific Islands Regional Viewing Guidelines and all Dolphin SMART program criteria.
- 2) Use binoculars for best viewing.
- 3) Change RPMs gradually when moving vessel in vicinity of dolphin(s).
- 4) When maneuvering vessel, maintain a position slightly behind and parallel to the dolphins' direction of movement. Avoid moving ahead or crossing in front of dolphin(s).
- 5) If a dolphin(s) approaches the vessel, put engine in neutral and remain in neutral while dolphin(s) are present.
- 6) If the dolphin(s) is not visible or resighted, be patient, and involve guests in locating them. If unsure of the dolphins' location when departing, go slowly. Dolphins can hold their breath for 5 - 7 minutes.
- 7) If another vessel is actively viewing a dolphin(s), find an alternate location and dolphin(s) to view responsibly.

REMEMBER, IT IS AGAINST FEDERAL LAW TO FEED OR HARASS WILD DOLPHINS