

White-beaked dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*



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White-beaked dolphin breaching © Kjell-Arne Fagerhelm

White-beaked dolphins live in the cold temperate and subarctic waters of the North Atlantic Ocean. They are fast, energetic swimmers and often ride the waves made by boats. These dolphins usually travel in groups of 5–30, but **superpods** of over 1,000 have been seen!

With their sturdy build, curved **dorsal fin**, and mix of black, white, and grey markings, they are easy to spot but they can be confused with the Atlantic white-sided dolphin. White-beaked dolphins are typically found further north than most other dolphins and are the most common species in many northern waters.

Adult length 2.8 metres

Adult weight 300 kg

Maximum age 39 years

Eats a wide variety of fish, may also take crustaceans and squid

Group size generally fewer than 10, but sometimes several hundreds

Predators killer whales, polar bear

IUCN status least concern (2023)

NA abundance >300,000

Hunted in 167* dolphins/year mean 2019-2023

Main threats:



Noise disturbance



Climate change



Pollution



By-catch



Hunting

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White-beaked dolphin in Kolgráfjörður, near the small fishing village of Grundarfjörður, Iceland © AlecOwenEvans/iStock

Even though white-beaked dolphins are built for cold water, **sea ice** can be very dangerous for them. Sometimes, shifting **pack ice** traps dolphins, making it hard or even impossible for them to reach the surface to breathe. Sadly, this can lead to drowning or being crushed by the ice. In Svalbard, one group of trapped dolphins was even eaten by polar bears [1]. Around Newfoundland, 29 of these ice entrapments were recorded between 1979 and 1991, with up to 350 dolphins killed during that time [2].



White-beaked dolphin © Brian Gratwicke

White-beaked dolphins are often seen riding the waves created by boats. While this **'bow-riding'** behaviour can help save energy [3,4], dolphins are often seen going back to where they started from [5], suggesting it is more about play than travel. White-beaked dolphins have even been seen harassing larger whales, such as fin whales, to swim faster and create a wave they can ride.



Research: Do all white-beaked dolphins actually have white beaks?