



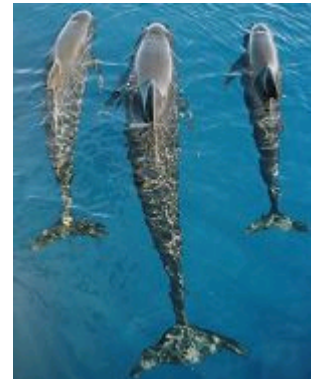
Dear Dolphin Friends,

The Year of the Dolphin 2007 is giving us the opportunity to present one species of dolphin each month in more detail. Dolphin of the Month for May is the Long-finned pilot whale, which despite the name, actually belongs biologically to the dolphin family.

Long-finned Pilot Whale

Whale or Dolphin?

Scientists are working on finding a biological division of species taking into account which species are more closely related to each other. Cetaceans are accordingly divided into toothed whales and baleen whales, and under this classification not only do the river dolphins belong to the toothed whales but also the dolphin-like whales, to which in turn belongs the dolphin family. Also part of this group is the Long-finned pilot whale, whose English name does not suggest that it is a dolphin at all. Yet the system (biological division according to genetic proximity) is based on evolutionary relationships as opposed to the layman's view which is more connected with outward appearances.



© Nico Schossleitner

How and where do Pilot whales live?

Pilot whales occur in cold, temperate and sub polar waters both in the northern and southern hemispheres. They prefer deeper water, and some therefore live in the open sea all of the time and others follow the migration of squid (their favourite food) from the high seas to coastal areas and back. Pilot whales are pitch black or dark grey

with a dorsal fin which bends backwards. The forehead area is markedly rounded. The shape of their heads used to remind whalers in the olden days of black cooking pans, from which derived its alternative name of "pothead whale". Pilot whales are very social animal, which migrate in groups of up to 100 individuals, under the leadership of one animal. These large dolphins are often involved in mass strandings because the family ties among the group are very strong and the entire school tends to stick to a single stranded animal. The most pressing threat is posed by fishing nets and direct hunting is blamed for the decline of the population. The Bern Convention and the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) prohibit the hunting of pilot whales and have placed this species under protection. The pilot whale is listed on Appendix II of the Bonn Convention.

WDCS supports pilot whale research

The Italian Tethys Research Institute is investigating the Long-finned pilot whale in the Ligurian Sea between the coasts of Italy, Monaco, France and Corsica with the support of WDCS. Every summer interested lay people join scientists on board the sailing boat Pelagos to be initiated into research work. All whale and dolphin enthusiasts over the age of 18 are welcome, the only requirements is to have sound knowledge of English and the readiness to work as part of a team.

News concerning Year of the Dolphin – Dolphin Quiz and Dolphin Diploma

Do you know what feature distinguishes the Irrawaddy Dolphin from the Bottlenose dolphin or the Common dolphin? You can find out about this and other exciting facts concerning dolphins if you take part in our latest Dolphin Quiz. Children and teenagers also acquire a Dolphin Diploma on our website.