



The Bahamas ~ Wild Dolphins

Film - 8 minutes

Denise Herzing, the Jane Goodall of the sea, dedicates her life to researching wild spotted dolphins in the Bahamas. Go underwater and fall in love with these sacred creatures.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Grades K - 5

Science

Science – Standard 6. Understand relationships among organisms and their physical environment

- Know that living things are found almost everywhere in the world and that distinct environments support the life of different types of plants and animals
- Know that an organism's patterns of behavior are related to the nature of that organism's environment (e.g., kinds and numbers of other organisms present, availability of food and resources, physical characteristics of the environment)
- Know that changes in the environment can have different effects on different organisms (e.g., some organisms move in, others move out; some organisms survive and reproduce, others die)

Science - Standard 13. Understand the scientific enterprise

- Know that in science it is helpful to work with a team and share findings with others
- Know that although people using scientific inquiry have learned much about the objects, events, and phenomena in nature, science is an ongoing process and will never be finished
- Understand efforts to improve political and social conditions around the world
- Understand influences on economic development around the world (e.g., why economic disparities between industrialized and developing nations have persisted or increased, how neo-colonialism and authoritarian political leadership have affected development in African and Asian countries, the continuing growth of mass consumption of commodities and resources since World War II)

Resource - [McREL Content Knowledge – Standards & Benchmarks](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 🗣️ *Why is it important to learn about animals that live in the wild?*
- 🗣️ *Why is the habitat in the Bahamas a good place to study dolphins? How does shallow water help the researchers? How does the shallow and clear water help the dolphins stay safe?*
- 🗣️ *How do dolphins communicate with each other? What do you think they are saying to each other?*

- 🗣️ *How long do baby dolphins stay with their moms? Why is it important for them to stay when they are young? What happened to the baby dolphin that was “wild” and wouldn’t stay with its mom?*
- 🗣️ *Why do you think it is important for dolphins to leave their moms as they grow older? Why should they hang out with other “juvenile” dolphins?*
- 🗣️ *Have you ever seen a dolphin in the wild? At a theme park? Describe your encounter.*
- 🗣️ *What can we learn from dolphins?*

ACTIVITY

A Talk with Mom

Imagine you are a dolphin. Write and illustrate a story where you and your mom are having a discussion about whether it is time for you to leave her and go find your own home in the sea. What will you need to know to live on your own?

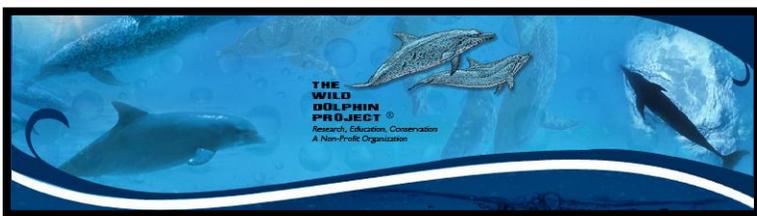
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Excerpts from interview at **explore.org**

Denise Herzing founded the Wild Dolphin Project to study free-ranging Atlantic spotted dolphins — “in their world, on their terms.” She is currently writing a book with that title.

What is the [Wild Dolphin Project](#)?

The Wild Dolphin Project is a scientific research organization that studies and reports on a specific pod of free-ranging Atlantic spotted dolphins (*Stenella frontalis*). Objectives of this long-term, non-invasive field research are to gather information on the natural history of these dolphins, including behaviors, social



structure, communication, and habitat; and to report what we have learned to the scientific community and the general public.

Why did you get involved?

I created this project so I could try to do what Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey did in the wild. I wanted to

observe, long-term and intimately, a society of wild animals (dolphins) and tell their story to the world.

What are three things about your NGO that you wish people knew?

- WDP works non-invasively, benignly, and respectfully with the dolphins as mutual participants in the research.
- WDP has a unique story to share about the dolphins and what it is like to live, love, and survive in the ocean.
- WDP needs long-term support to continue its mission

Did you have an inspirational figure in your life growing up?

Jacques Cousteau was inspirational for his exploration of the oceans and telling the story. Jane Goodall was inspirational for her exploration of another species, non-invasively. And my father was inspirational for his gentleness with nature and his unconditional support of my studies, despite having a very difficult life of war and loss.

What are some things that people simply don't know about wild dolphins that they should?

Dolphins have long-term friendships. The dolphins' world and society is primarily about relationships. Their lives are enhanced by complex relationships (which doesn't mean they aren't challenging relationships and issues). I think that a dolphin's greatest joy is probably in the companionship of another.

Tell me about the family structure of the dolphin.

Again, it is dependent on the species. Atlantic spotted dolphins have close ties between mothers and calves. After 3 years of nursing, calves join juvenile groups to learn social rules. Females mature around 9 or 10 years and can get pregnant at that time. Previous to female maturation, many females have been learning how to babysit, in preparation for their lives as mothers. Females can change their friendships based on reproductive status. Males tend to form lifelong friendships and coalitions.

What is the status of the dolphin population?

Our population of Atlantic spotted dolphins in the northern Bahamas was stable, around 200 individuals, until the hurricane seasons of 2004 and 2005. After that, over 35% of our known individuals were missing, either through direct loss or secondary habitat/food loss. There are many species of dolphins that are endangered around the world, some who have sensitive and small home ranges, and others who live in polluted waters. Marine mammals, in general, have slow reproduction — investing much time in their young, so impacts on mammal populations are especially significant.

Has global warming or environmental pollution of the sea had any effects on dolphins?

Global warming and pollution affects all life in the sea. Dolphins are top predators and indicators of the health of the oceans. As sea levels and temperatures rise and coral reefs and other primary production systems are affected, so too will be the dolphins because they depend on fish for their food. And because dolphins have blubber layers, many toxins accumulate in dolphins, some of which are "dumped" through milk to the young. In urban areas with heavy pollution from run-off in the waterways, dolphins have lesions, diseases, and are in very bad shape.

