
Hector's dolphin: description, habitat, threats, conservation and other

Introduction

The Hector's dolphin is a mammal. Its scientific name is *Cephalorhynchus hectori*. This dolphin is the smallest marine animals on earth. Hector's dolphins often prefer to travel in small groups of up to 5, though they can be seen in pods of 20 or more during mating periods. They are endangered and there is only less than 8,000 dolphins left in the world.

Physical Description

They have stocky bodies and a unique rounded dorsal fin. The dolphins have hair as body covering as they are mammals. Most of the dolphin's body is a light gray color with the flippers, flukes and dorsal fin a dark grey to a black color. The weight of an adult dolphin is 50kg the size is 4.9 feet tall.

Habitat

These dolphins are found only in the shallow coastal waters along western shores of New Zealand's North Island.

Diet

The Hector's Dolphins mostly hunt for cod, herring, squid, various fish and other benthic prey near the shore. They usually hunt in pods of 8.

Reproduction

Females are believed to give birth to young alive every 2 - 4 years. Mothers nurse their young by feeding them milk for up to 18 months until their child is able to hunt and survive on its own.

Threats

Currently the main threat to the survival of this species is by catch in net fisheries. Sometimes the dolphins will get strangled by the net and eventually die. Several deaths caused by ship strikes have been reported. Natural predators of hector's dolphin include, sharks and whales example the orca. Changes in sea temperature, freshening of seawater, acidification and sea level rising also affect the dolphin's habitat.

Conservation

Action has been taken to protect these dolphins from fishing by closing part of the dolphin's range on the West Coast North Island. This species was once hunted for bait, but this has now stopped. A few reservoirs do not allow people to throw their fishing nets in the ocean to stop the

dolphins from getting strangled in the net. Due to the coastal habitat of Hector's dolphin, the species is vulnerable to a large number of different threats such as chemical pollution, vessel traffic and habitat modification. Some beach resorts have put up signs or posters to stop people from throwing things in the sea to prevent habitat loss for the hector's dolphin.

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