



Size

Adults measure between 1.2-1.4 m and weighs up to 50 kg.

Colour

The sides and back of this dolphin are light grey, with white "flames" reaching up along the sides of its body. The underside is whitish, while the face, flippers, the dorsal fin and tail are all black. There is a crescent-shaped black mark between eyes and blowhole.

What do they eat?

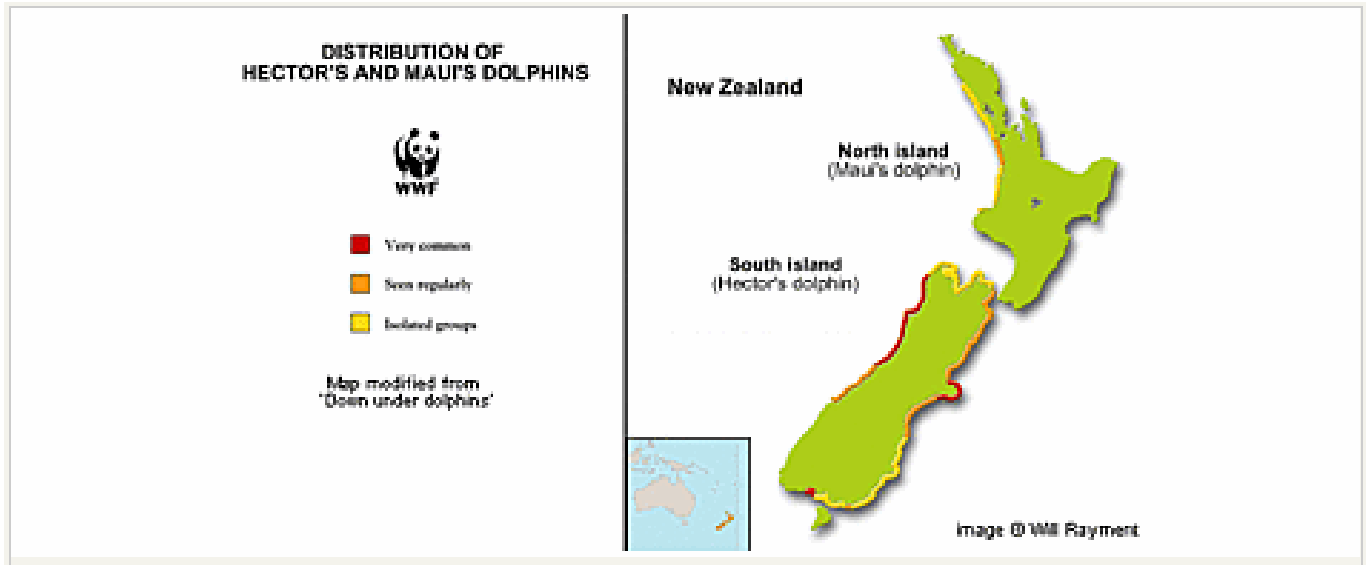
Maui's dolphins spend most of their time making short dives (90 seconds or so) to find fish on the sea floor. They also feed on fish and squid in mid water and sometimes close to the surface.

Current population

Forty years ago there were 1000 maui's dolphins, now there are only 55 left. Their population takes a long time to grow as they only have one calf (baby) every 2-4 years. They live for forty years, but they don't start breeding (having babies) until they are 7 to 9 years old. This means that each female dolphin only has a few calves in her lifetime.

Where do they live?

West coast of North Island, New Zealand. They live in the coastal waters.



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What are the main threats to Maui's dolphins?

A slow breeding rate and small population size have made of Maui's dolphin a very endangered subspecies. In fact, just more than one human-induced death every seven years seriously threatens the chances of population recovery.

However, over since March 2001, seven dead Maui's dolphins have been found. Five of these deaths were due to fishing, one was impossible to determine and one was because of natural causes. This dolphin is vulnerable to set net (gill net) and trawl fishing, marine pollution and debris, boat strikes and genetic bottleneck.

Set net (gill net) and Trawl fishing

The most significant threat to Maui's dolphins is from set net fishing. Dolphins do not seem able to detect the fine nylon nets with echolocation and swim into them.

They cannot swim backwards so are unable to free themselves from the net. Since they cannot reach the surface to breathe, they drown within a couple of minutes. A set net ban is in place in part of the dolphin's range. The ban at this stage does not fully include harbours yet, even though dolphins have been sighted there.

In the South Island, Hector's dolphins have drowned in coastal trawl nets. It appears there is a risk to the Maui's dolphin where there is overlap between dolphin habitat and trawl operations. Trawlers are still operating beyond of 1 nautical mile of the coast where dolphins continue to be vulnerable to bycatch.

Marine pollution and debris

Dolphins like Maui's which inhabit shallow coastal waters are vulnerable to the pollutants which humans allow into the sea. Chemicals from industrial waste, stormwater and agricultural runoff like PCBs, DDT, dioxins and metals have been found in Hector's dolphin's blubber (including Maui's dolphins).

These pollutants bio-accumulate, which means they increase in potency as they move up the food chain. Maui's dolphins are near the top of their food chain and these pollutants can be passed on to young dolphins through their mother's milk. High levels of exposure can cause loss of fertility and compromise immune systems in marine mammals. Another form of pollution which threatens Maui's dolphins is solid rubbish such as plastic shopping bags which can be mistaken for squid and ingested, killing the dolphin.

Boat strikes

The propellers of motor boats pose a risk to Maui's dolphins. Dolphin can suffer skin surface cuts to severe injuries from propellers. For example, in Akaroa Harbour, South Island, a Hector's dolphin calf died due to the direct impact of a boat strike.



