



DYING

IN CAPTIVITY

53 PER CENT OF DOLPHINS DIE
WITHIN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS

ABOUT 25 PER CENT OF CAPTIVE
CALVES ARE STILLBORN

THEIR AVERAGE NUMBER OF
OFFSPRING IS LESS THAN ONE

THEY ARE OFTEN ISOLATED IN BARREN
TANKS, MANY SUFFER FROM STRESS
AND SOME EVEN COMMIT SUICIDE

EIGHT-FOOT DOLPHINS CAN LEGALLY BE
CONFINED IN 24-SQUARE-FOOT TANKS
THAT ARE ONLY SIX FEET DEEP

THEY LIVE IN CHLORINATED,
TREATED WATER

THEIR AVERAGE LIFE SPAN IS
5 YEARS

CAPTIVE DOLPHINS ARE HAND-FED
DEAD FISH

THEY ARE UNABLE TO USE SONAR
BECAUSE OF SOUND BOUNCING OFF
TANK WALLS

CAUSES GIVEN FOR CAPTIVE DOLPHIN DEATHS...
TRAUMA, DEATH OR INJURIES SUSTAINED IN FIGHTS, EUTHANASIA, DROWNING, KIDNE

TO ENTERTAIN US

A harrowing insight into the hugely profitable and brutal world of captive dolphins

by Torsten Engelbrecht and Jeremy Smith

Last year Ric O'Barry, one of the original trainers for *Flipper*, the famous US television series about a dolphin, witnessed the infamous dolphin drive fisheries that take place annually around the harbour of Taiji in southern Japan. He had gone there with colleagues from One Voice, the French animal protection group for which he now works.

Each year many thousands of dolphins and small whales are encircled with giant nets and coralled into the lagoon at Taiji. Once the animals have been tightly packed together they are slaughtered in a frenzy of bloodletting that turns the lagoon red. Last year 20,000 dolphins and small whales died in this way, killed for their meat.

In recent years the drive fisheries have inspired international uproar. But O'Barry believes that those campaigning against them are missing one central

point. The market price of dolphin meat has plummeted due to concerns about it being laced with mercury and other toxins. These days, the only thing that makes these fisheries financially viable, O'Barry asserts, is that in amongst the men with knives are men with nets – men employed by the captive dolphin industry to catch live specimens for the purposes of entertainment.

O'Barry wrote up what he saw in Taiji in his diary. The entry is long, but bears quoting in full.

'January 30: When we arrive at the lagoon at 6am at least 50 divers from various dolphinariums are gathered on the beach around a fire, wearing wetsuits. The whalers are also present but... remain at a distance from us: they have been warned by the police to leave us alone.

'The dolphins are staying at the far end of the lagoon, no doubt scared and confused. At 6.30am the process begins to drive them toward the beach. The whalers do this by

dragging [their] net closer toward the shore. The dolphins' panic increases as the space they are confined in gets smaller and smaller. The dolphin trainers get in the water with long pieces of rope. They tie [them] around the dolphins' tail flukes and drag them onto the beach. There is a lot of yelling and turmoil as the divers subdue the dolphins and drag them ashore. Mothers and babies are separated as the dolphin trainers pull the animals out of the lagoon, one after the other, and we can hear the dolphins' calls of distress.

'The trainers... line the dolphins up in very shallow water, close to the rocky beach. The dolphins have never experienced gravity before. Helplessly grounded like this, all their body weight puts pressure on their internal organs: lungs, liver, and heart. This is extremely stressful for them, especially the pregnant females. »

FAILURE. PNEUMONIA. GASTRITIS. MALNUTRITION AND STRESS. SEVERE BRONCHOPNEUMONIA. CHLORINE »

'Tents [made out of] blue tarpaulin have been raised on the beach to prevent us from filming the stranded dolphins, but once in a while the tarp flares up and we can see the many dolphins literally piled up on one another bashing violently against each another.

'The dolphin trainers begin the process of selecting the dolphins that fit the desired criteria. They are typically looking for young females with no blemishes. Dolphins that have been injured as a result of the rough treatment are obviously not desired. The selected dolphins are forced into stretchers, and, hanging from the side of a motorised boat, they are taken to the awaiting sea cages in Taiji harbour.

'The selection process goes on for hours. The dolphins that have not yet been dragged ashore are absolutely panic-stricken. Some collide with the capture nets in a massive effort to escape. They get entangled in the nets underwater and, unable to reach the surface to breathe, they will suffer a slow and painful death of suffocation.

'We constantly look at the trainers to see a reaction, and they simply don't seem to care. Dolphins are suffocating and sustaining injuries all around them, but their cries for help are met with complete indifference and lack of compassion from the trainers. It is shocking to see. A large dolphin struggles to get free of the nets for more than 20 minutes, but the trainers do nothing to help the dolphin out of its misery. A dolphin calf, less than a year old, is swimming all by itself in a corner of the lagoon. The calf got separated from its mother and looks so lost in the chaos. This calf is among the last to be rounded up. It is too young to fit the dolphinariums' criteria and is not among the chosen.

'When, after more than three hours, the trainers have finally selected the dolphins they want, the dolphins that are too old, too young, too big, have too many blemishes or are injured are

hauled back into the water. The whalers tell us these dolphins will be killed. Later, however, we are told the remaining dolphins, except four, were released. How many of them have suffered internal injuries from the ordeal, we will never know. Many have difficulty swimming, show signs of broken and dislocated pectoral fins, swim erratically and breathe very hard. Some simply sink to the bottom, never to surface again. Today we have witnessed the strong connection between the Japanese dolphin drives and the dolphin captivity industry.'

All dolphinariums allege that *their* dolphins have not come from the drive fisheries. But while this may be true for specific institutions, the evidence shows that *all* the methods used to capture dolphins are cruel. 'In extreme cases, five to ten marine mammals might die following their live capture, temporary warehousing, transportation and acclimatization to captivity,' estimates Beatrice Miranda from the Swiss task force for the protection of marine mammals (ASMS).

A 1995 study of captured dolphins showed that they are six times more likely to die in the month directly after capture than at other times. If it takes dolphins a month to 'recover' from capture, there can be no doubt that they are badly affected by the experience.

Other studies have described the risk of so-called 'capture myopathy', a muscle disease associated with the stress of capture, restraint and transportation, and characterised by degeneration and death of skeletal and cardiac muscle. Furthermore, dolphins live in family-style groups and because whole groups are often captured in nets before the 'best' specimens within them are selected, capture myopathy can affect many more animals than are finally selected.

Those chosen are shipped to dolphinariums around the world, where

they'll spend the rest of their days performing tricks for ice-cream-munching humans. Nonetheless, advocates of dolphinariums, like Ulf Schönfeld of Duisburg Zoo in western Germany, assert that 'keeping dolphins in marine parks is unproblematic'. Schönfeld says: 'They can be maintained similar to all other zoo animals. The animal's freedom of movement does not play a major role. What they need is gainful activity.' (Schönfeld cannot, however, offer any proof to back up his statements.)

By contrast, the journal *Nature* recently published a study by Georgia Mason, an animal behaviour researcher at Oxford University, which highlighted the problems captivity brings for meat-eating animals accustomed to roaming vast hunting grounds in the wild. Mason's study mentions polar bears as an example, which are confined in zoo enclosures typically one millionth of the size of the areas they would explore in the wild. Captive polar bears suffer serious behavioural problems and die much younger than their wild counterparts.

This is very similar to the experience of captive dolphins. In the wild, dolphins swim an average of 40 to 100 kilometres a day. To swim such distances in a pool would involve them completing many thousands of dull, repetitive circuits. As with the polar bears, dolphins in captivity exhibit behavioural disorders, including increased aggression against fellow dolphins and humans, apathy and movement stereotypes such as circular swimming and emerging for air only at a single location.

Again as with polar bears, being kept captive also affects a dolphin's life span. In an investigation into the marine-park industry for Florida's *Sun Sentinel* newspaper, journalist Sally Kestin revealed that 1,127 bottlenose dolphins died in captivity over the last three decades. Kestin wrote: 'Of the 875 whose ages can be determined, more than half never reached [the age of] 10, and 83 »

POISONING. PENETRATED BY STINGRAY SPINE. ZINC POISONING. SUFFOCATION. BACTERIAL SEPTICAE

LIVING

IN THE WILD

DOLPHINS CAN LIVE UP TO 40 YEARS

THEY CAN REPRODUCE EVERY TWO
TO THREE YEARS, STARTING
AT THE AGE OF 10

THEIR AVERAGE NUMBER OF
OFFSPRING IN A LIFETIME IS SIX

THEY LIVE IN COMPLEX SOCIAL
STRUCTURES, STAYING IN A FAMILY
UNIT THEIR ENTIRE LIVES

DOLPHINS SWIM UP TO 50 MILES
A DAY, AND DIVE TO DEPTHS
OF 500 FEET

THEY LIVE IN THE OCEAN'S
SALT WATER

THEIR AVERAGE LIFE SPAN IS
30 YEARS

DOLPHINS HUNT FOR AND
EAT LIVE FISH

THEY USE SONAR TO 'SEE' AND
TO INTERACT

INTERNAL BLEEDING, SHOCK CAUSED DURING CAPTURE, SHOCK CAUSED DURING VETERINARY TREATMENT.

per cent were dead before 20.'

Furthermore, the rate of infant mortality for dolphin offspring is the same in captivity as it is in the wild, with more than half dying soon after being born. Superficially, that might seem to provide rare evidence that captivity is at least no worse for dolphins than living in the wild. But why should infants born in a tank free from sharks, food shortages and pollution die at the same rate as those born in the wild? As marine scientist and dolphin-stress expert Naomi Rose says: 'I believe that the stress the mothers [of captive-born dolphins] suffer affects their physical and even psychological ability to keep their offspring alive.'

ANOREXIA. JAW CAUGHT IN NETTING. RUPTURE OF STOMACH ULCER. HEART DISEASE. CAPTURE MORTALITY

The idea that captive dolphins suffer from stress is borne out by many of the official reasons given for their deaths in captivity. They are recorded as dying from 'chronic oesophageal ulcers', 'ulcerative dermatitis', 'rupture of stomach ulcers' and 'gastric ulceration'. Just as with

Perhaps aware that people are increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of circus-style exploitation of animals and zoos, many marine parks today insist that the entertainment they provide is just an extra added on to the real business of educating the public and conserving a species. For example, Sea World claims to be 'striving to provide an enthusiastic, imaginative and intellectually stimulating atmosphere to help students and guests develop a lifelong appreciation,

understanding and stewardship [of] our environment'. Sea World says its goal is 'to instill a respect for all living creatures'. No doubt to help it achieve this mission, a tour-guide training manual used at the Sea World in Orlando, Florida, directs employees not to use the words 'captured', 'cage', 'tank' and 'captivity', but 'acquired', 'enclosure', 'aquarium' and 'controlled environment'.

In the event of

marine parks working hard to protect it. The dolphins are smiling, after all... Serious and negative news about what is happening in the natural environment does not sell tickets.'

The simple fact is keeping dolphins in captivity is not good for those in the wild. The removal of a single dolphin affects the remaining group in other ways besides causing widespread myopathy. In the wild, mother and baby dolphins live together

inseparably for the first five years of the baby's life. The relationship is particularly intense, with the mother demonstrating huge affection and protectiveness for her calf. When these mothers (the primary target of the hunters) are captured, the babies must grow up without them. This has disastrous consequences – both for the baby, which often dies, and for the group, whose extraordinarily well-organised social structure is irrevocably disrupted.

Not every animal within a dolphin group has the same rank or status. There are alliances and sub-

POOL. FAILURE TO ADAPT TO CAPTIVITY. BACK INJURY. INGESTION OF FOREIGN OBJECT. SHOCK

humans, dolphin ulcers are caused by stress. Sometimes the cause of dolphins' deaths is explicitly given as stress. One dolphin was even recorded as having committed suicide by jumping out of its tank.

An investigation by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) into four facilities run by US dolphinarium chain Sea World highlighted some of the many problems that confront dolphins in captivity. Not the least of these is the amount of noise they are subjected to. At the height of the tourist season, WDCS revealed, there may be tourist access to petting-pool dolphins for up to 14 hours a day, with several hundred visitors crowded around the edges of the animals' tanks at any one time. Music is played over loudspeakers, the trainers address the audience and the animals using microphones, and there are occasional firework displays. As Toni Frohoff, research director of the US dolphin conservation organisation TerraMar Research, says, 'each and every day dolphins are subjected to a constant source of often intense stress and disturbance from which they cannot escape'.

being asked whether specific dolphins have died, the manual offers guides the following advice: 'If people ask you about a particular animal that you know has passed away, please say, "I don't know".'

Whatever language they use, dolphinariums are lying to the public. There is no evidence to suggest that people who have seen animals in captivity are then more likely to either treat them better in the wild, live more sustainably in order not to damage their habitat or increase their campaigning efforts to protect them. As the legendary French oceanographer Jacques Cousteau once said, 'there is about as much educational benefit to be gained from studying dolphins in captivity as there would be from studying mankind by only studying prisoners held in solitary confinement'. Indeed, the zoo experience may make people even more apathetic about conservation. Rose writes: 'The glossy façade is so compelling, people become complacent and assume all is well out in the ocean, with the staff at

groups:

there are animals that know better than others where to find food; there are 'aunts' that assist mothers during birth; if these kinds of animals are captured the effect on the group is particularly pronounced. Marine mammal expert David Lusseau studied a group of 62 dolphins in the waters off New Zealand for seven years. He found that when just two key individuals were removed from the group, the group split in two and only reunited when the two individuals returned.

There are currently estimated to be 200 dolphinariums around the world, 40 of which are in Japan. There are dolphins kept in amusement parks, roadside shows and shopping centres, and even travelling dolphin shows. The Mirage Gambling Resort in Las Vegas keeps captive dolphins in a tank in the middle of the Nevada desert. In Switzerland the Conny-

SHOCK. SALMONELLA. KILLED BY ANOTHER ANIMAL. STARVATION. ADRENAL EXHAUSTION. EMACIATION. GASTRIC

land dolphinarium keeps them inside a discotheque. In Canada there is one swimming alone inside a shopping mall.

The modern proliferation of dolphinariums is being driven, of course, by money. In the 1960s a live dolphin was worth \$300. Two years ago Sea World in Florida

'Sunset Sam was God's sunshine for us all, and his sun warmed many lives. His memory and the gifts he gave the world in general and each individual who ever saw him will outlive us all.'

with-dolphin centres, and five dolphin therapy sites (three of which opened their

RONIC OESOPHAGEAL ULCERS. ULCERATIVE DERMATITIS. EMACIATION. ACCIDENTAL COLLISION WITH »

paid \$130,000 for a dolphin. Dealers report that young dolphins can fetch prices well in excess of \$400,000.

Dolphins have become so valuable that aquatic parks now use them as loan security. 'When Miami Seaquarium proposed a new \$17m whale and dolphin exhibit,' explains Sally Kestin, '[it] put up its marine mammals, including Lolita the killer whale, as collateral on the loan to finance the project.'

And the animals carry on generating cash even after they die. 'I interviewed Mitchel Kalmanson, a marine mammal appraiser in Florida who provides life insurance on dolphins at parks all over the world,' explains Kestin. 'He devised a formula for determining a dolphin's insurance value. Juvenile dolphins up to the age

With hundreds of dolphinariums in existence, and more and more opening up, the demand for new dolphins has never been higher. Besides those plucked from the slaughter of the Japanese drive fisheries, Cuba has sold more than 140 dolphins since 1995 to aquariums in countries that include Mexico, Argentina, Spain and Israel. And in the summer of 2003 the Pacific Solomon Islands were the site of one of the largest dolphin captures ever recorded: at least 100 bottlenose dolphins were hauled out of the sea; of these 30 were immediately flown to Parque Nizuc, a water and adventure park in the Mexican tourist mecca Cancun. It has since been confirmed that the import licences granted by Mexico's ministry of the environment for these animals were illegal. Mexico failed to meet its obligation, as a member of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, to demand verification from the

Solomon

doors in 2003). Two more therapy facilities are being constructed right now.

All over the world swim-with-dolphin programmes are springing up in tourist centres eager to cash in on the latest craze. In the Caribbean alone, tourists can now swim with dolphins at more than 30 marine park attractions, double the amount of five years ago. In just one year new swim-with-dolphin centres opened in Jamaica, Anguilla, Antigua, Bermuda and Tortolla in the British Virgin Islands; others are in development in the Cayman Islands, the Dominican Republic, St Lucia and Curaçao.

Some people attribute almost miraculous therapeutic effects to swimming with dolphins. Others are more sceptical, pointing out that there has never been a study published in a peer-reviewed journal pointing to the lasting efficacy of dolphin-assisted therapy or its advantages over other forms of therapy. The sceptics say the alleged healing power of ultrasonic waves emitted by dolphins has never been supported

SULTING FROM FRACTURED JAW. MATERNAL TRAUMA. SHOCK CAUSED DURING MOVEMENT. NEO-NATAL

of five are valued at \$50,000 to \$100,000. Adults up to the age of 30, covering the peak breeding years, are worth \$100,000 to \$200,000. Captive-bred and female dolphins are worth more. He factors in breeding record, training, history of swimming with people, and physical condition of the facility where an animal is to be kept. Premiums, usually paid annually, range from 4 to 15 per cent of the animal's value. The insurance covers death due to accidents or disease.'

When the dolphins do die, stressed and malnourished, the dolphinariums exploit their deaths as a way of raising further funds, using sentimental announcements to induce previous park visitors to send cash testimonials. Thus, in an appeal to the local media in 2001 the executive director of Florida's Clearwater Marine Aquarium said:

Islands that the large-scale capture of the dolphins did not endanger the local population. New hunting grounds are also being developed in areas that include Central and South America and West Africa.

Within the dolphinarium industry there is one sub-sector that is expanding at a particularly rapid rate at the moment: specialised swim-with-dolphin centres, many of which provide dolphin-therapy programmes. According to Sakae Hemmi, director of the Japanese environmentalist organisation the Elsa Nature Conservancy, Japan currently has more than 10 swim-

scientifically. Then again, anyone who has ever witnessed dolphins in the wild comes back changed by the experience, and would say that the lack of scientific data is an irrelevance.

But whatever the actual merits of dolphin therapy, the morality of keeping dolphins in captivity does *not* depend on whether it is good for humans. Wrenching dolphins from their world in order to 'improve' ours may deceive a few children into being happy; it may even alleviate the direct suffering of the occasional ill human. But it will do nothing to solve the wider problem, that of humanity's destructive and possessive relationship with the natural world. ■

CERATION. FOOD POISONING. REACTION TO DRUG OR VACCINE. FRACTURED SKULL. JUMPED OUT OF THE TAN

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