

Dolphins

The Greek sea enjoys the privilege of hosting four species of dolphins: the striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*), the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), the Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) and the short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*). All dolphins have an echolocation system which they use to orient themselves, to forage and to communicate. Their sociable, playful and romantic communication involves codes that are hard to imagine for a marine mammal.

In Cretan waters and also in the sea marine park in Sporades (northern Greece) we can see with a little bit of luck (easier to see in Sporades) the common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*).

The common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) is unfortunately anything but common in the Greek seas, being threatened with extinction.

The common dolphins' colors are quite complex, a combination of grey, black, white and yellow, and quite different from those of the other dolphins. Their average length is 1.80 meters and they feed on fish such as anchovies and sardines, and, in the Corinthian Gulf, probably on squid.

We do not know the exact number of common dolphins swimming in Greek waters, but we do know that their population has been gravely reduced during the past 30-40 years. Under normal circumstances, they give birth to one calf every 2-3 years and gestation lasts 10-11 months. Their maximum life span is unknown. They can be found in areas up to 200 meters deep and near the coast in the northern Ionian Sea, the Corinthian and the Saronikos Gulfs, in the island complexes Dodekanisa and Cyclades, in the northern Euboean, the Pagasitikos and the Thermaikos Gulfs. The Thracian Sea is also of great importance to the species. In the Corinthian Gulf, common dolphins, striped dolphins and Rossi's dolphins live together in mixed communities—a phenomenon that is not observed anywhere else in the world.

References: <http://www.wwf.gr>