

Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphins on Edisto Beach

General Description

Atlantic bottlenose dolphins are found in tropical and temperate waters, and are common along the Atlantic coast and on Edisto Beach. They eat fish, squid, and crustaceans. They're one of the most studied marine species in the world and are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. This species is not considered threatened or endangered. They are highly intelligent and friendly, which allows marine biologists and scientists to get up close and personal with them, so that they can easily observe, track, and protect them.

Because they must come to the surface to breathe, dolphins never fully sleep. They can live to be 40-60 years old, with the females usually outliving the males. They begin to reproduce between the ages of 5-15 years old. They travel in pods, with the males called bulls, the females called cows, and their babies called calves. Their daily activities include feeding, socializing, traveling, and resting. Dolphins communicate with one another through echolocation, each one having their own unique sound.



Photo by Ken Tingman



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Atlantic bottlenose dolphins are generally gray in color, ranging from light gray to almost black. Their bellies are almost white. They are sleek, powerful swimmers, and can grow up to 12 feet in length, weighing between 300 and 1,400 pounds. They hunt together in small groups to herd schools of fish into the shallow water; they then create a wave to push themselves and the fish onto the shore, where they lie with their mouths open to catch the fish as they head back into the water. This is called strand feeding, and is a learned behavior passed down from their mothers. This strand feeding can be seen often within the marsh areas in and around Edisto Beach, and it is a unique behavior of dolphins in South Carolina and Georgia.

Atlantic bottlenose dolphins can often be seen feeding in the waters on Edisto Beach. Look for them moving about in the water hoping for dinner!

Protect Our Dolphins

People should always keep a safe distance away from dolphins (at least 50 yards) and should avoid touching, feeding, or disturbing them.

Source: South Carolina Department of Natural Resources <https://dnr.sc.gov> (2025)