

Blue crabs: Easy to catch, great to eat, and the shallows are just crawling with them, **Pages 4-5**

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GULF & BAY

Your guide to boating,
fishing and water sports
in Tampa Bay



Don't do them any favors

Sure, watching wild dolphins is great, but feeding them is illegal and hurts them in the long run.

Cute, yes, but k

FAST FACTS

Dolphin Smart

Dolphin Smart is a partnership program developed by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and National Marine Fisheries Service, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, and the Dolphin Ecology Project. Its mission is to promote responsible stewardship of wild dolphins in coastal waterways. Participation is for commercial businesses that conduct and book wild dolphin tours, or any commercial vessel that may opportunistically view wild dolphins. Online at DolphinSmart.org

Take a tour

The Dolphin Smart program recently certified its first "Dolphin Smart" tour boat operator in southwest Florida, Adventure Cruises of St. Pete Beach. Cost: adults \$35, children under 12 \$25, under 3 free. Call (727) 423-4247 or visit Adventurecruise.net. Look for the Dolphin Smart logo when you go on wildlife tours.



By the numbers

Fifty dolphins have been killed or injured by fishing gear in Florida in the past five years, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration:

2005	4	2008	13
2006	16	2009	8
2007	9		

To help

To report feeding or harassment of wild dolphins, call the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Enforcement Division toll-free at 1-800-853-1964. To report an injured or entangled dolphin or other wildlife, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission toll-free at 1-888-404-3922.

To learn more ...

On dolphins and interactions with anglers, visit Mote.org or SarasotaDolphin.org
On fishing line recycling and bin locations, visit Fishinglinerecycling.org

Wild dolphin bring pleasure, but their interactions with humans may bring them great pain in the end.

BY TERRY TOMALIN | *Times Outdoors Editor*

Fishermen in Sarasota Bay are used to one dolphin coming around for handouts. ¶ This wild animal is so accustomed to taking bait from humans that the locals call him "Beggar." ¶ "He patrols about 6 miles of water near Nokomis," said Stacey C. Horstman, Bottlenose Dolphin Conservation Coordinator for the National Marine Fisheries Service in St. Petersburg. "He is a real tourist attraction." ¶ While some might see Beggar's routine as cute, those who work with wild dolphins are not impressed. ¶ "Over the years he has sent more than 20 people to the hospital for stitches," Horstman said. "Feeding wild dolphins alters their natural behavior. It is dangerous and illegal." ¶ People should not feed dolphins for the same reason they should not feed alligators or bears. These wild animals come to associate people with food and, as a result, lose their natural fear of humans.

In the case of dolphins, that means more of these marine mammals interacting with fishermen and boaters. Over the past decade, biologists have noticed increased numbers of these sea creatures stranded, showing tell-tale signs of meetings with fishing lines, hooks and lures.

Dolphin Smart

Florida has a healthy bottlenose dolphin population, but unfortunately, we may be loving these creatures to death.

Federal officials say there are three interrelated problems impacting Florida's wild dolphins:

- People inadvertently harass dolphins when they try to get too close to watch them in their natural habitat.
- People feed dolphins, which alters their natural behavior.
- Dolphins have learned to associate recreational fishing with food, and subsequently, they become entangled or ingest deadly hooks and line.

In hopes of addressing these issues, federal officials have embarked on an ambitious "Dolphin Smart" program. The first step is to educate nature tour operators how to properly view dolphins. In May, the first Dolphin Smart training was conducted at Clearwater's Island Way Grill.

"We just certified our first operator," Horstman said. "We hope to certify more this month."

Horstman hopes recreational boaters will also log onto a new website

properly act around wild dolphins.

"We would love for every recreational boater to become dolphin smart," she said. "If you see a group of dolphins, stay at least 50 yards away. If they come closer, which they probably will, put the vessel in neutral and stay put until they move on."

Do's and don'ts

The number of wild bottlenose dolphins suffering serious or fatal injuries from boats and recreational fishing gear is an ongoing problem on the Florida's west coast.

You can help protect these magnificent mammals by following a few simple rules. The following "best practices" from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries were developed by marine scientists and wildlife managers who observe and work with dolphins on a regular basis:

- Never feed wild dolphins. It's harmful and illegal. Feeding teaches dolphins to beg for food and draws them dangerously close to fishing gear and boat propellers. Feeding is illegal under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act.
- Don't dump leftover bait. It may attract dolphins to fishing areas and encourage them beg for bait, or worse, steal your catch. Toss your leftover bait in the freezer so it can be reused another day or give it to fellow fishermen.

while you are fishing. Wait for them to move on. It will also reduce the chance that you hook a dolphin.

- If the dolphins won't move on and show an interest in your bait or you catch, then pick up the anchor and head to another spot.
- Release catches away from dolphin when and where possible to do so without violating any state or federal fishing regulations. Feeding or attempting to feed a marine mammal in the wild is prohibited.
- Check your gear and terminal tackle. Make sure you don't have any cuts or knots to help avoid line breakage. Even a small piece of line in the water can prove deadly to dolphins, turtles and variety of sea birds.
- Use circle and corrodible hooks. Circle hooks may reduce injuries to fish dolphins and sea turtles. Corrodible hooks (any hook other than stainless steel) eventually dissolve.
- Stay at least 50 yards away from wild dolphins to avoid causing potential harm. Maintaining a safe distance helps keep dolphins wild.
- Prevent wildlife entanglements by recycling fishing line. Place all broken or used fishing line in a Monofilament Fishing Line Recycling Bin. If no recycling bins are available, put your broken or used fishing line that has been cut into pieces in a lidded trash can.
- Stash your trash. Littering is illegal and can be harmful to wildlife. Collect any trash and place it in a lidded trash can.

keep your distance



LARA CERRI | Times (2009)
Begger, a Nokomis-area dolphin known for leaping out of water when people offer food, gets momentarily enticed by a beer bottle. Beggar has injured almost two dozen people over the years.