

The Secret Language of Dolphins

Adapted from text by Crispin Boyer



Photograph by
Augusto Stanzani/
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Here's a conversation worth talking about: A mother dolphin chats with her baby...over the telephone! The special call was made in an aquarium in Hawaii, where the mother and her two-year-old calf swam in separate tanks connected by a special underwater audio link. The two dolphins began squawking and chirping to each other—distinctive dolphin chatter.

It seemed clear they knew who they were talking with. But what were they saying? That's what scientists are trying to find out by studying wild and captive dolphins all over the world to decipher their secret language.

Just like humans, dolphins talk to each other. Starting from birth, dolphins squawk, whistle, click, and squeak. And just as you gesture and change facial expressions as you talk, dolphins communicate nonverbally through body postures, jaw claps, bubble blowing, and fin caresses. Deciphering “dolphin speak” is tricky because dolphin behaviors can mean something different every time you see them.

If you like mysteries and detective work, then this is the job for you. And who knows—maybe someday you'll get a phone call from a dolphin.