

## National Geographic Readers: Dolphins

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Though smart enough to become theme park tricksters, dolphins are first and foremost wild mammals.

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# It's a Dolphin!

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What swims  
in the water,  
but isn't a fish?

What whistles  
and chirps,  
but isn't a bird?

What loves to jump,  
but isn't a frog?

It's a **DOLPHIN!**

# Fish or Mammal?

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A dolphin is a mammal—  
just like you.

## Water Words

### OXYGEN:

An invisible gas in air and water that animals breathe in.

### MAMMAL:

A warm-blooded animal that drinks milk from its mother and has a backbone and hair.

Dolphins look like fish, but they are different in some very important ways.

Dolphins have lungs and breathe air. They get oxygen through a hole on top of their heads.

Their tails move up and down.

They have soft, smooth skin.

A dolphin's body temperature is always about 97 degrees Fahrenheit.

Fish have scales.

Fish have gills. Gills help fish get oxygen from the water.

Their tails bend from side to side.

A fish's body temperature matches the temperature of the water it's in.

# A Dolphin's Life

A baby dolphin is called a calf.

A baby dolphin has a small mouth. The calf smacks food against the water to break it into bite-size bits.

## Water Words

**CALF:**  
A young dolphin

Q

What do dolphins have that no other sea animals have?

A

Baby dolphins

A calf can swim as soon as it is born. It drinks milk from its mother's body. When the little dolphin is about six months old, it starts to eat fish.



A dolphin pod

Dolphins live in small groups called pods. Some pods join together to form schools. A dolphin school may have more than 1,000 animals.

Dolphins use squeaks, squeals, and whistles to “talk” to each other. Some dolphins in a pod are in charge of watching for sharks and other predators.

### Water Words

**PREDATOR:**  
Animals that eat other animals



## Water Words

**PREY:** Animals that are eaten by other animals

Dolphins work together to catch prey. Dolphin pods will swim circles around a school of fish until the fish are tightly packed together.

This big group of fish is called a “bait ball.” When the fish have nowhere to escape, the dolphins take turns diving in for a snack.

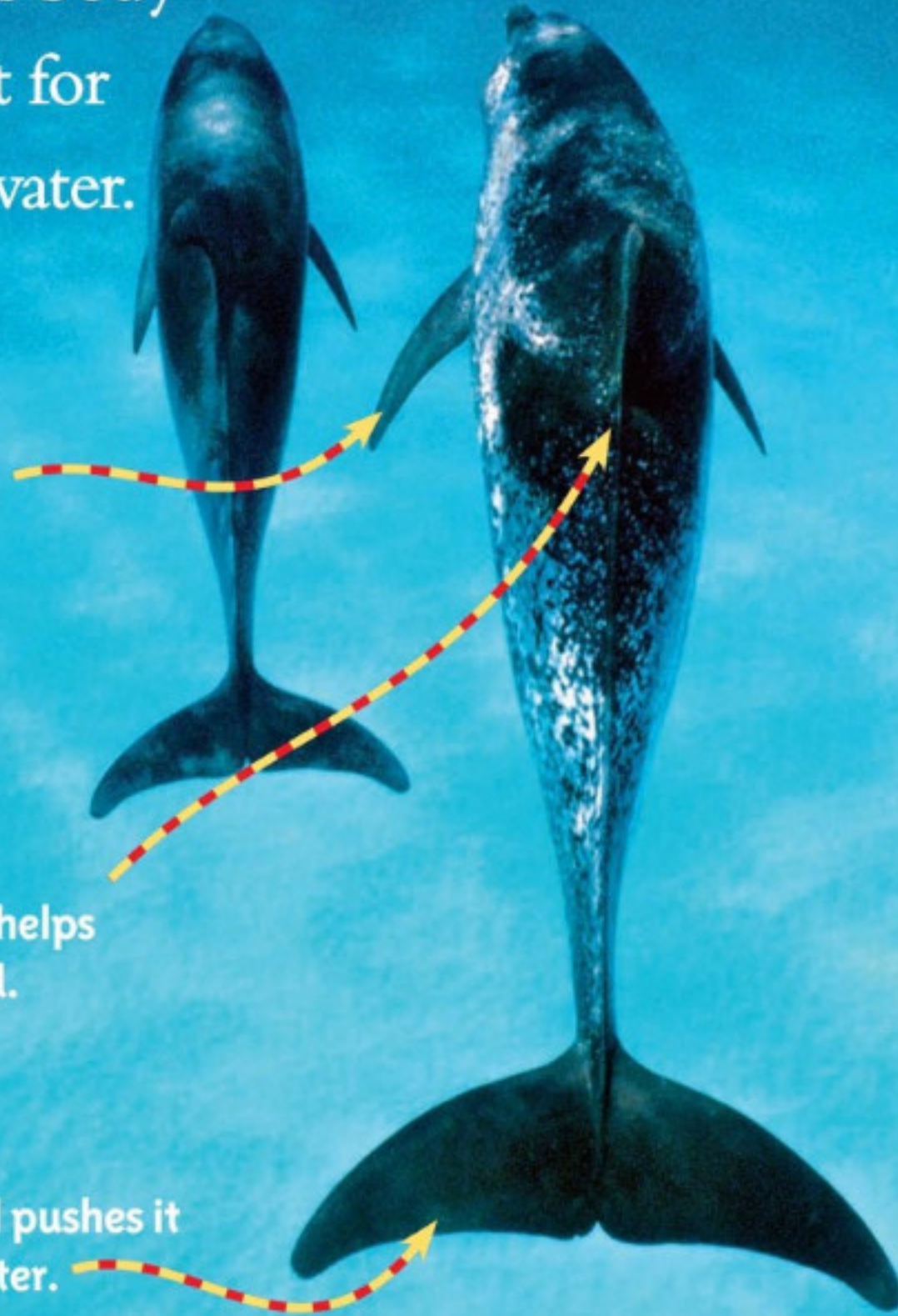
# Under the Sea

A dolphin's body is just right for life underwater.

Flippers help a dolphin start, stop, and turn.

The fin on a dolphin's back helps it stay balanced.

Its powerful tail pushes it through the water.



Q

Why did the dolphin cross the ocean?

To get to the other side.

A

When a dolphin swims slowly, it rises to the surface and breathes once or twice a minute. When a dolphin swims fast, it leaps out of the water to catch its breath.



Blowhole

When a dolphin breathes out, air blasts out of its blowhole at 100 miles an hour.



What do dolphins like to eat with peanut butter?

jellyfish



Dolphins have great eyesight, but the ocean can be very dark. It's hard for dolphins to see the little fish they like to eat on the ocean floor.

If a dolphin is hunting alone, it will put its head to the ground and make a clicking noise.

The noise hits anything in the dolphin's path and bounces back. A dolphin can find a fish by seeing it with sound!

This dolphin is using echolocation. You say it like this: eck oh low kay shun. Dolphins actually use echoes to locate the fish they can't see.



# Where Dolphins Live

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More than 30 different kinds of dolphins live on Earth.

Most dolphins swim in warm ocean waters near the Equator. But some live in cooler seas north and south of the Equator, and some even live in rivers.

The hourglass dolphin lives way out in the middle of the ocean.



The Hector's dolphin usually stays close to land.

## Water Words

**EQUATOR:** An imaginary line halfway between the North and South Poles.

# What's the Difference?

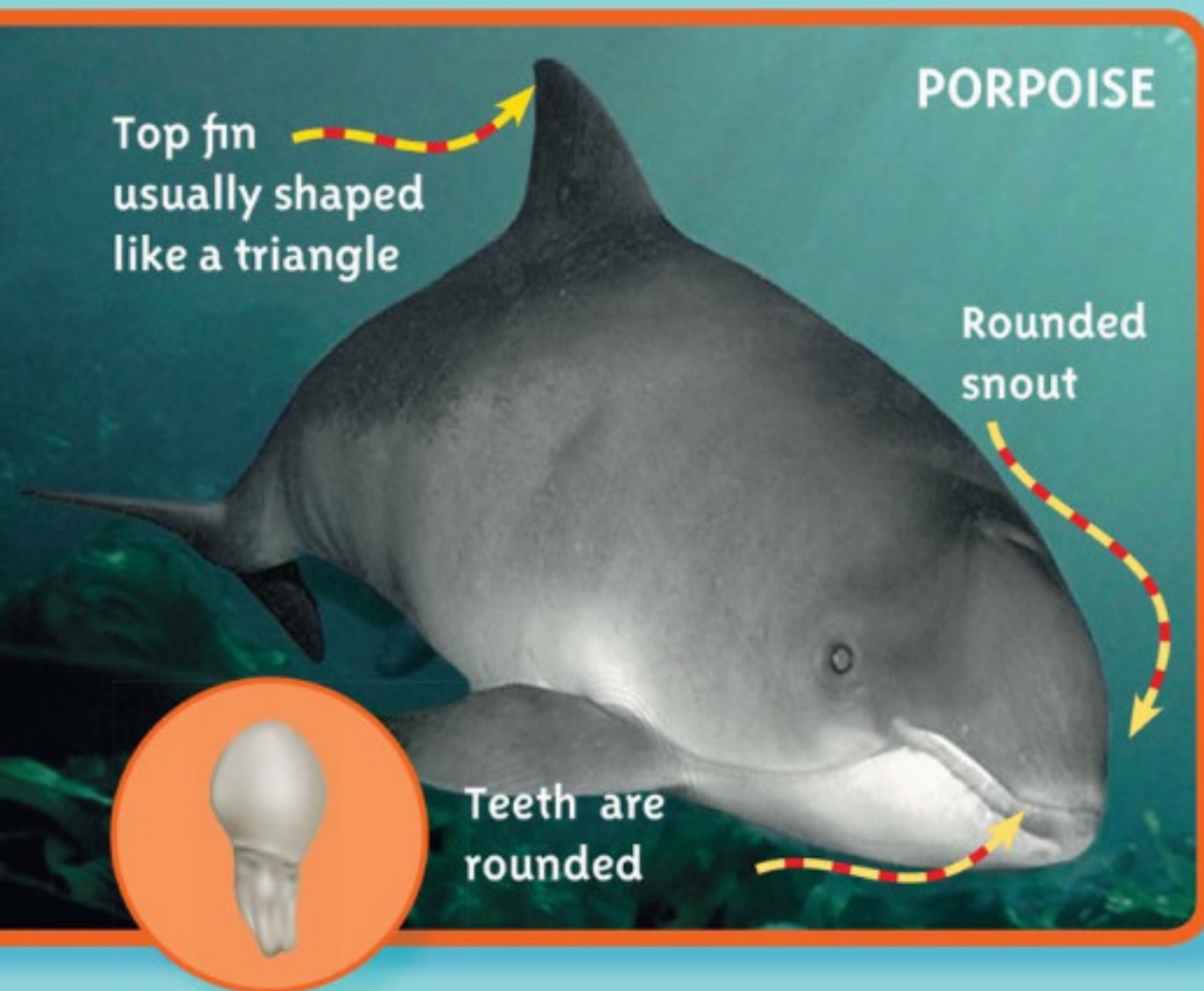
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Q

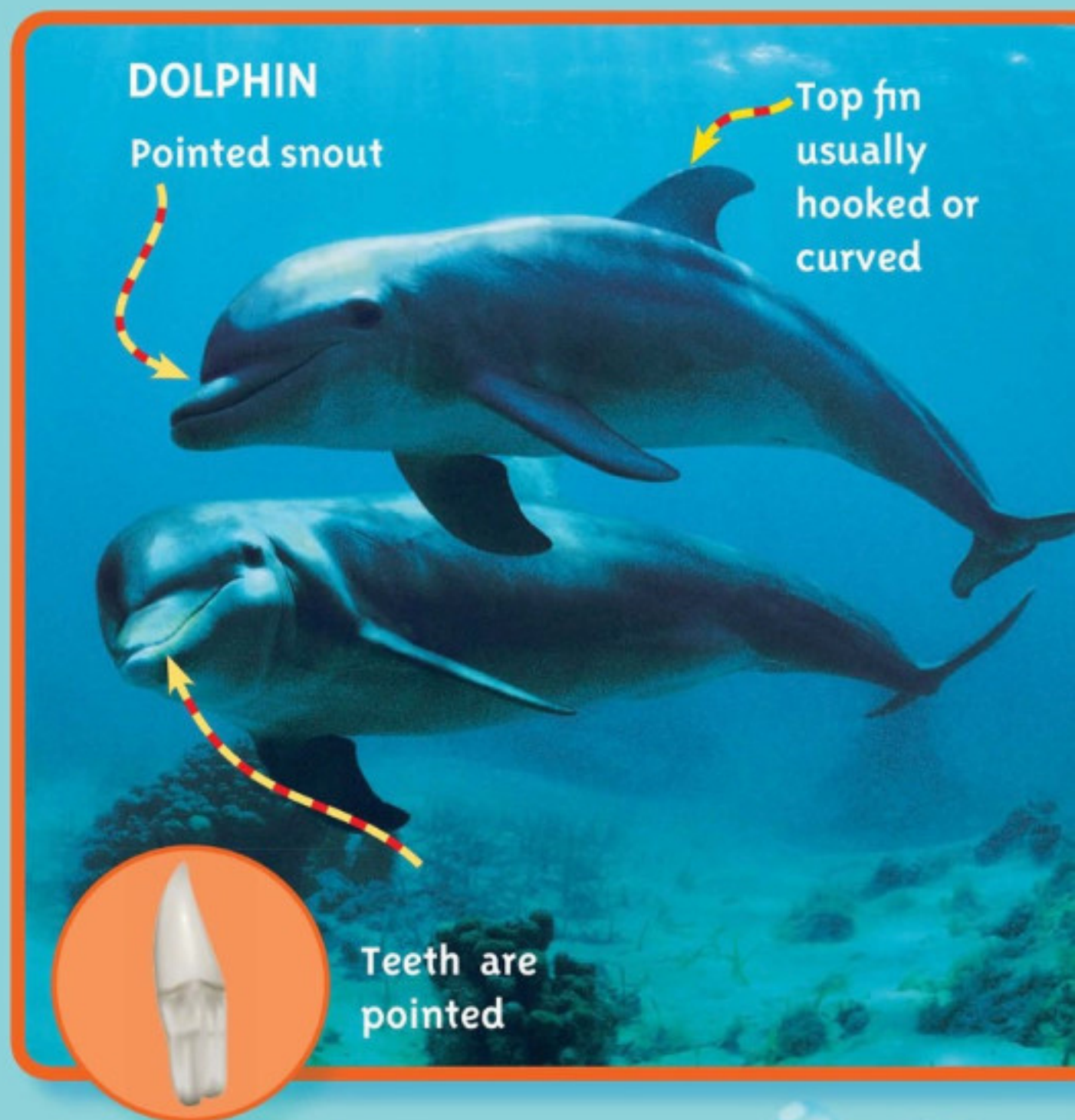
Did the dolphin do a belly flop by accident?

No, he did it on purpose

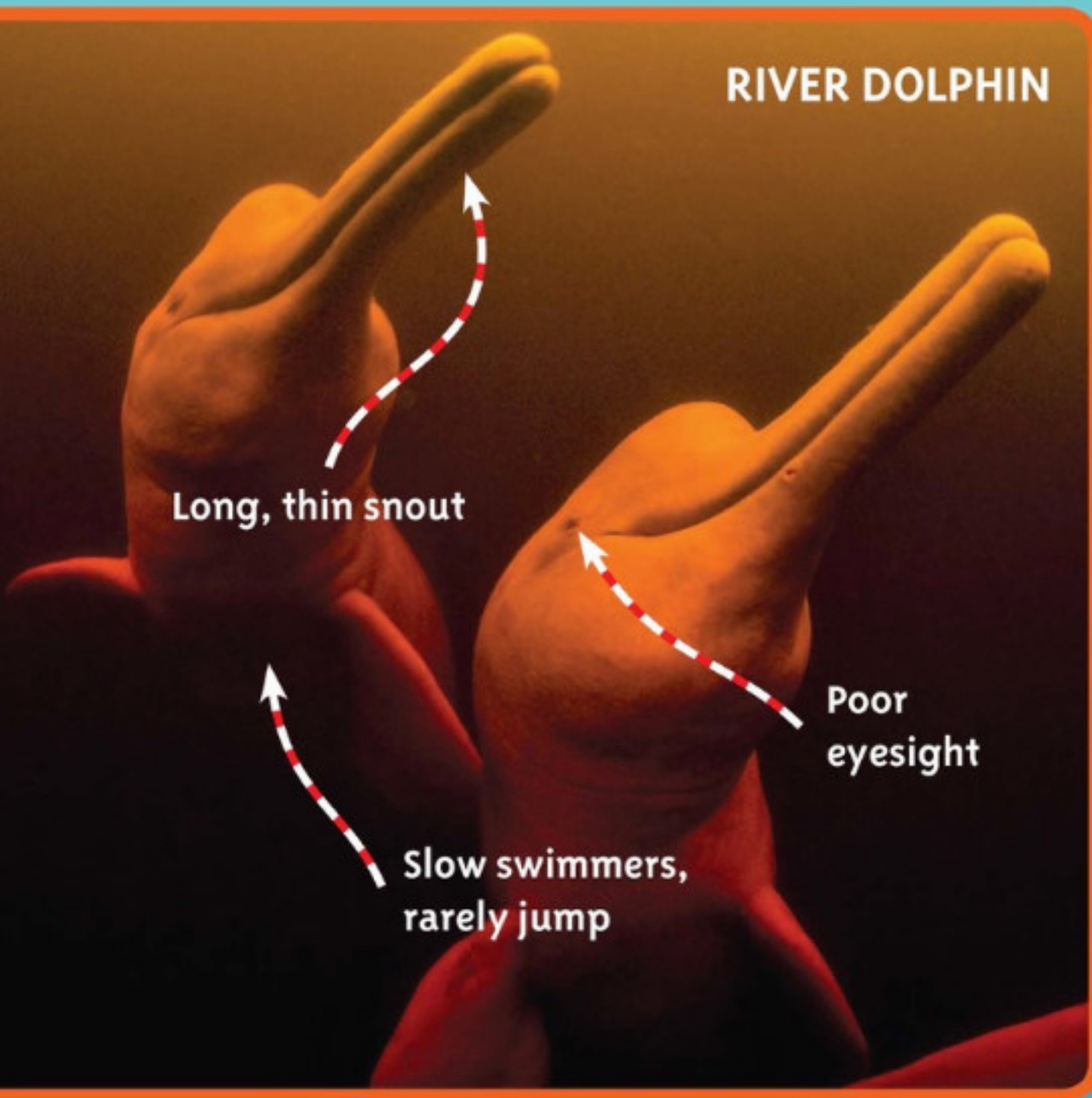
A



Have you ever seen a porpoise? It looks like a dolphin, but it's different. You say it like this: poor pus.



A dolphin's body is longer and leaner than a porpoise's body. Dolphins are more curious and playful, too.



Have you ever seen a dolphin with a long pointy snout? This funny looking mammal is a river dolphin.



River dolphins are smaller than their ocean-swimming cousins. They are also less active and playful.

# Super Dolphins

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Q

What is a spinner dolphin's favorite amusement park ride?

The merry-go-round.

A

## SUPER SPINNER

A spinner dolphin twirls through the air like a spiraling football. It can jump almost ten feet into the air and spin up to seven times.



## EASY BREATHER

A dolphin spends most of its life holding its breath. A Risso's dolphin can go for 30 minutes without coming up for air.



## DEEPEST DIVER

Whales and dolphins are very closely related. In fact, some animals we call whales really are dolphins. The long-finned pilot whale is a dolphin that can dive almost 2,000 feet!

The most amazing dolphin of all is the **ORCA**, also known as the killer whale. The orca wins almost every record-setting award in the dolphin category.

**FASTEST**

A killer whale can swim seven times faster than an Olympic swimmer!

**LONGEST LIVING**

A killer whale can live up to 90 years.

**HUNGRIEST**

An orca eats everything from sea turtles and penguins to seals and sharks.

**BIGGEST**

Males can grow almost as long as a school bus.

# Goofing Off

Dolphins spend a lot of time hunting for food. And they are always on the lookout for danger. But sometimes dolphins just want to have fun. Dolphins make up all kinds of games.

Q

Why did the dolphin go to the party?

A

To have a whale of a good time.



**PLAYING CATCH:**  
Toss seaweed into the air and try to catch it.



**SURFING:** Ride along storm waves or waves breaking near a beach.



**TAG, YOU'RE IT:** Chase each other through the water.

# Dolphins and Humans

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Q

What is a dolphin's favorite TV show?

Whale of Fortune!

A

Dolphins are gentle, playful creatures. They are also very smart, which is why people and dolphins get along so well.

By learning about these friendly marine mammals, humans are helping to protect dolphins and the waters they live in.





**CALF:** A young dolphin



**EQUATOR:** An imaginary line halfway between the North and South Poles



**MAMMAL:** A warm-blooded animal that drinks its mother's milk, has a backbone, and hair.



**OXYGEN:** An invisible gas in air and water. It helps animals get energy from food.



**PREDATOR:** Animals that eat other animals



**PREY:** Animals that are eaten by other animals