

Dolphin Watch



Objective

Students will learn natural history information about dolphins while participating in a behavioral observation activity.

Materials

For each student group

- A film or video about dolphins
- A copy of the Dolphin Watch ethogram chart on page 2 for each student (premark one copy as your answer key)

Background

An ethogram is a tool scientists use to record animal behavior. There are a number of different ways to use ethograms. Sometimes scientists record an animal's behavior at regular intervals, say every five minutes. Other times, scientists watch for one certain behavior and make a mark whenever the target behavior occurs.

Action

1. Explain the term ethogram. Distribute copies of the Dolphin Watch ethogram chart and tell students that they are going to use this ethogram chart to observe dolphin behaviors on film. Everyone will be looking for the 10 behaviors listed on the ethogram.
2. Ask students to explain or demonstrate the dolphin behaviors listed on the ethogram so everyone agrees what each behavior looks like.
3. Begin the film. Students begin recording behaviors. (You may want to stop the film if there are questions.)
4. After the film, compare the number of marks students made for each behavior. Lead a discussion about the students' ethograms, using the following questions: Which behavior did you see most often? Was there any listed behavior you didn't see at all? Did you see any behaviors that weren't listed on the ethogram?

5. Conclude by discussing these topics:

If you watched the movie again, do you think you'd see more behaviors? Why or why not? (Students would probably see more behaviors because they would know what to expect.)

How would this observation activity be different if you were watching live dolphins at SeaWorld? (Students would need to be even more observant to allow for more unexpected and impromptu behaviors.)

If you were watching live dolphins in the wild? (The behaviors would be even more unexpected and harder to see because of wave action and opaque sea water.)

Dolphin Watch



Name _____

Scientists use ethograms to record animals' behavior. The grid below is one kind of ethogram. Review the different dolphin behaviors listed, then watch for each one as you see a movie about dolphins. Every time you see a behavior listed below, make a tally mark in the correct line. For example, if you saw three leaps, the tally mark would be x x x. At the end of the film, you'll have a record of all the dolphin behaviors you saw.

BEHAVIOR	OCCURRENCE
hunting	
feeding	
diving	
leaping	
breaching	
tail slapping	
echolocating	
vocalizing	
caring for young	
interacting with another dolphin	
interacting with other species	
other behavior(s) not listed	