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A Newly Published Report Details the Sea Lion - Dolphin Relationship in the S.M. Bay



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r. Maddalena Bearzi of the Ocean Conservation Society out of Marina del Rey just published a study in the *Journal of Mammalogy*, which describes, according to Bearzi, "the first detailed description of mixed species aggregations and habitat usage by three dolphin species and sea lions."

In the report Bearzi describes the Conservation Society's observations on how the popular and abundant California sea lion takes advantage of the local prominent dolphin species' food finding abilities. The organization monitored the four species in the equation (bottlenose, short beaked and long beaked common dolphin + the sea lion) for four years, detailing the specifics of their interactions concluding that, beyond doubt – the sea lions have deduced that dolphins are superior food locators and by trailing them, their feeding prospects increase greatly.

"The results show that sea lions spend a significant amount of time following dolphins, they initiate aggregation and departure from dolphin schools," said the report. "These aggregations occur more often than is expected by chance and no aggressive behavior between sea lions and dolphins was ever observed at or near the surface."

While the sea lions have been observed with all of the mentioned dolphin species, they seem to gravitate especially to the common dolphin, which are the multi-colored smaller speedier variety, that often surf in bow wakes. In the total number of sightings of common dolphin during the period, there were sea lions in the vicinity 71% of the time, according to the study. Another solidifying fact to support the proposition that the sea lions are following the dolphin specifically is that in many of the observations there were no sea birds participating in the feeding.

"Dolphins use echolocation as a principle means of locating prey," said Bearzi in the report. "Whereas sea lions rely mostly on their vision. The sea lions have a better chance of finding resources that are patchily distributed in the open ocean by exploiting the more sophisticated food-finding ability of the dolphins."



While the study exposed that sea lions are benefiting more from the relationship it also suggested that dolphins might, in some ways, gain an advantage or two from the presence of the pinniped.

"A high presence of predators in a feeding ground rich in prey can, for instance, encourage the prey schooling behavior, facilitating the capture of food for both predators," said the report. "Even if dolphins only occasionally join sea lions, it may still be to their advantage to be cooperative."