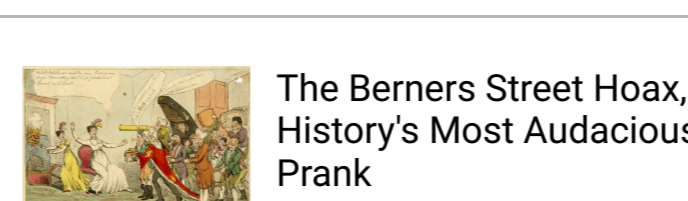
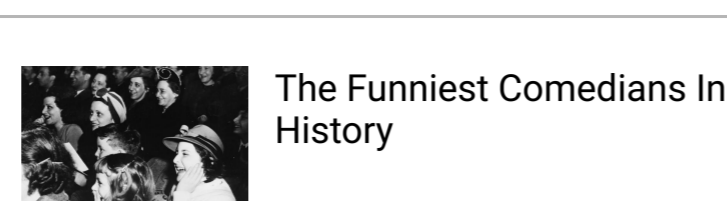


MORE FROM CURIOUS HISTORIAN



Dolphins, Superheroes Of The Sea

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Two Bottlenose Dolphins Leaping from the Water. Source: (gettyimages.com)

Dolphins have a long history of rescuing humans from various marine hazards. In fact, the earliest stories of dolphin rescues were recorded in ancient Greece. In the seventh century B.C., the Greek poet Arion wrote about being thrown into the sea by pirates and carried back to shore by a dolphin. Plutarch told a similar tale of being rescued by a dolphin after his boat overturned in a storm. Whether these stories were fact or fiction is unknown, but there is no shortage of more recent examples of humans being rescued by dolphins.

In the eighteenth century, a group of Vietnamese sailors whose boat had been sunk by Chinese invaders was rescued by a pod of dolphins. Consequently, the Vietnamese began worshipping dolphins and whales, even erecting the "Temple of the Whale." More recently, a team of researchers led by Maddalena Bearzi was studying bottlenose dolphins near the shore when one dolphin suddenly broke away and began swimming out to sea, followed by the other dolphins. Curious, the research team went after them. The dolphins swam three miles to where an eighteen-year-old girl was in the water, suffering from hypothermia. The dolphins swam in a circle around the girl until the research team arrived to rescue her.



Common bottlenose dolphin. Source: (wikipedia.org)

In the year 2000, fourteen-year-old Filippo fell from his father's boat in the Adriatic Sea. He might have drowned had a dolphin not swam up to him and pushed him back to the boat where his father was able to pull him aboard. In 2004, dolphins led a rescue boat to a group of divers who had been lost in the Red Sea for over thirteen hours. That same year, a scuba diving instructor in Thailand was led to safety by a dolphin after the tsunami. In 2006, dolphins led rescuers to an unconscious scuba diver in the sea near the Channel Islands. In 2008, they rescued a fisherman in the Philippines after his boat capsized in a storm.



Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin. Source: (wikipedia.org)

Dolphins are also reputed to protect swimmers from sharks. In August 2007, a surfer off the coast of Monterey, California was attacked by a great white and bitten three times before dolphins came to his rescue. They swam in a circle around the surfer, keeping the shark away, as he made his way back to shore. A similar incident happened with another surfer in 2004. In April 2014, Adam Walker was attempting an eight-hour endurance swim between two New Zealand islands when a shark started to follow him. Once again, the dolphins formed a protective circle around the swimmer to keep the shark away.



Dolphins protect Adam Walker from shark. Source: (yourswimlog.com)

Not everyone takes these accounts of dolphins protecting swimmers from sharks at face value. Dissenters of the idea not only doubt the heroic intentions of the dolphins, but they also believe the sharks are being miscast as villains in the stories. One such dissenter attests that there are more people bitten by other people in New York City than there are people bitten by sharks in the world. This is most likely true as there are probably more people in New York City than there are in the ocean at any given moment. Once factors like teething babies and mind-altering drugs are brought in the equation, it's not hard to believe that there are quite a few chompers in New York City. Nevertheless, dissenters believe that the swimmers were never in any danger and the presence of the dolphins was due to nothing other than the fact that dolphins and sharks eat the same food and are therefore often found near each other.



Moko the dolphin. Source: (flickr.com)

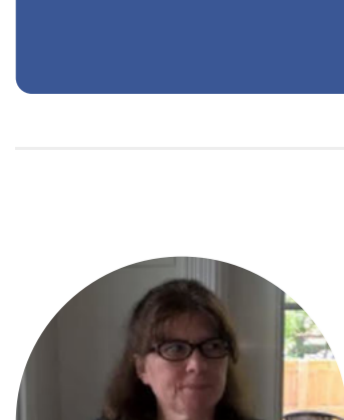
Despite the naysayers, it seems clear by the sheer number of reports, many of which were witnessed by multiple people, that dolphins do in fact rescue people. And their rescue efforts aren't limited to humans. In addition to rescuing members of their own species who are sick or injured, dolphins have been known to help other animals. In 1978, sailors from the USSR witnessed a pod of dolphins protecting a sea lion from a killer whale. In 2008, a pygmy sperm whale and its calf had become stranded on a beach in New Zealand. Biologists were trying to get them back into deep water without success until a local bottlenose dolphin named Moko showed up and led the whales to a nearby channel.

There is no question that dolphins are the rescuers of the sea, but no one knows exactly why they do it. Some scientists believe they do it simply out of curiosity. Others wonder if the dolphins are actually trying to play with the humans and the rescue is just a fortunate side effect. However, other scientists attribute the rescues to the dolphins' heightened intelligence. Dolphins are much like humans in terms of intelligence and social behavior, so it is only logical that they are also capable of empathy and altruism.

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Penny, besides writing, loves to spend her time with family and friends. In her spare time, she also enjoys playing the piano, board games, and taking online classes on topics that interest her.

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