

Clymene Dolphin

Stenella clymene

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Because the Clymene dolphin is one of the most recently recognized species of dolphins (Perrin *et al.*, 1981), very few papers have been published on this species (Perrin and Mead, 1994). Its restricted range, limited to the tropical and warm temperate waters of the Atlantic Ocean, has not been well studied cetologically. These two facts make the Clymene dolphin one of the least-known delphinids.

I. Characters and Taxonomic Relationships

The Clymene dolphin is a small, but rather stocky, dolphin with a moderately long beak, separated from the melon by a distinct crease (Fig. 1). The dorsal fin is tall and nearly trian-

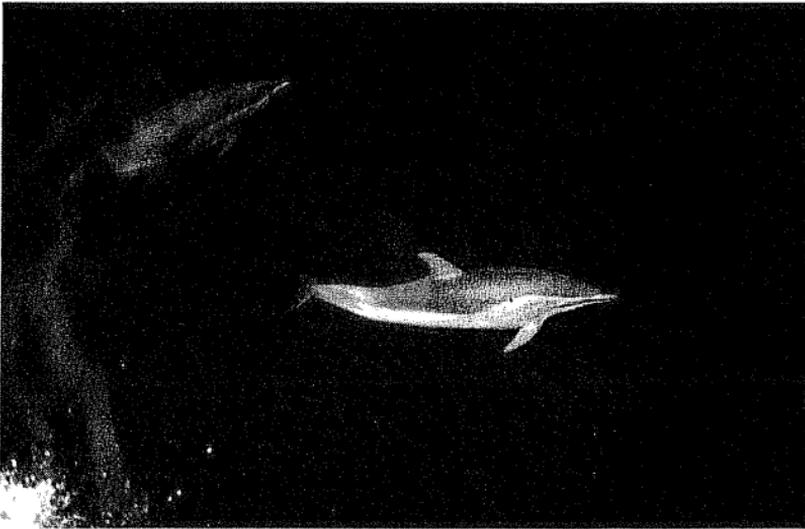


Figure 1 *Clymene dolphins ride the bow wave of a research vessel offshore the Gulf of Mexico. Most of the species' distinctive characteristics are visible.*

gular to slightly falcate, and the flippers and flukes are typical of dolphins of the genera *Stenella* and *Delphinus*.

The COLOR pattern is tripartite, with a white belly, light gray flanks, and dark gray cape. The cape dips below the dorsal fin, somewhat lower than in the spinner dolphin. There is a dark gray line running down the length of the top of the beak, and often a dark, indistinct band between the white belly and gray sides. The most distinctive feature is a black "moustache" marking of variable extent on the top of the beak. With the exception of the moustache, most of the species' external characters are very similar to those of the spinner dolphin. This is one of the reasons why the Clymene dolphin was not fully recognized as a distinct species until 1981 (Perrin *et al.*, 1981).

These small dolphins probably do not reach much over 2.0 m in length, with males somewhat larger and heavier than females (Jefferson *et al.*, 1995; Jefferson, 1996). Adult-sized females have been between 171 and 190 cm, and males between 176 and 197 cm (Jefferson, 1996). The maximum weight known is about 80 kg, but they may get somewhat heavier than this.

The skull of this species is very similar to that of *Stenella longirostris* and *S. coeruleoalba* (especially the latter) (Fig. 2) It can be distinguished by its small size (<415 mm) combined with a short, broad rostrum.

Taxonomically, *S. clymene* has been considered to be most closely related to *S. longirostris* and *S. coeruleoalba* (Perrin *et al.*, 1981). Genetic studies by LeDuc *et al.* (1999) indicate that its cytochrome *b* sequence is actually closer to *S. coeruleoalba*.

II. Distribution and Ecology

The Clymene dolphin is found only in the Atlantic Ocean, in tropical to warm temperate waters. The range is not well documented, especially in South Atlantic and mid-Atlantic waters. Most sightings have been in deep, offshore waters.

There is very little known about the ecology of the species. It apparently feeds mostly on mesopelagic fishes and squids, including some species that are vertical migrators. Many dolphins bear bite marks and scars from cookie cutter sharks on their bodies.

III. Behavior and Life History

Schools of this species are often moderately large, although most appear to consist of less than a few hundred individuals (Perrin and Mead, 1994). Schools may be segregated by age and sex class, as evidenced by several mass stranded herds that were composed largely of individuals of one or the other sex (Jefferson *et al.*, 1995).

Clymene dolphins are active bow riders, often approaching ships from many kilometers away for a free ride. They are also often aerially active and they do spin (Fig. 3), although apparently not as frequently or as elaborately as the spinner dolphin.

There have been no studies of the life history of this species based on large samples of specimens. Most of what we know is based on scant information. Both males and females appear to reach sexual maturity by the length of 180 cm (Jefferson, 1996). Nothing is known of other life history parameters, but they are thought to be broadly similar to those of other members of the genus.

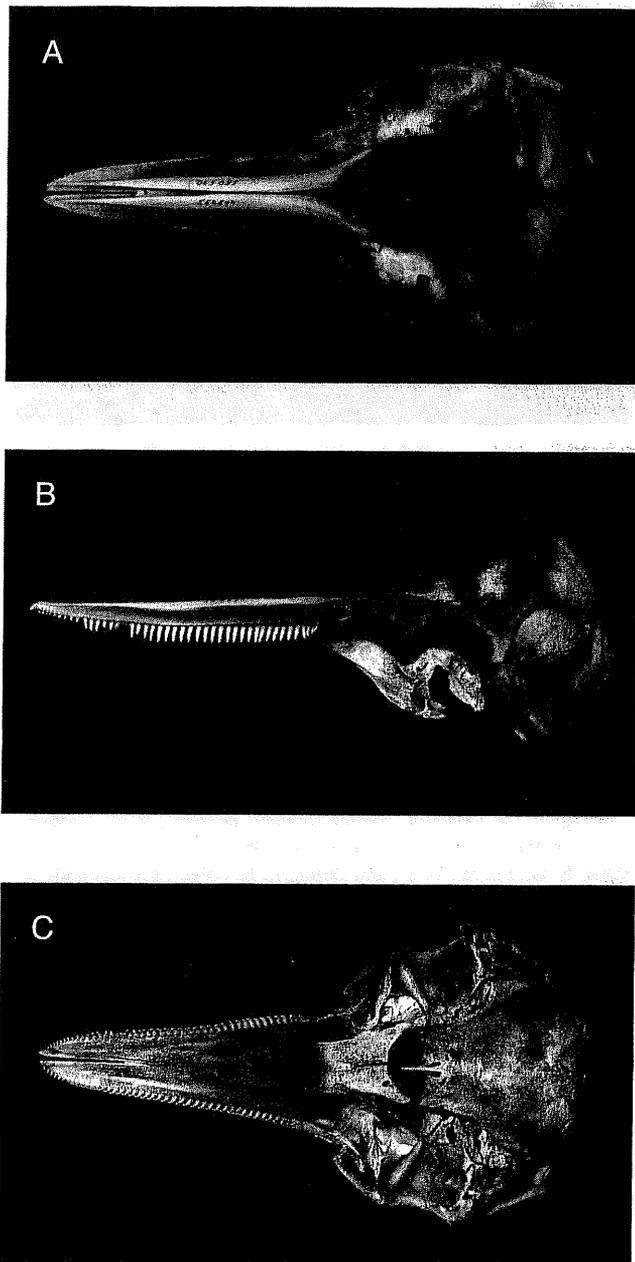


Figure 2 Dorsal (A), lateral (B), and ventral (C) views of the skull of a Clymene dolphin from the Gulf of Mexico.

IV. Interactions with Humans

No major conservation problems are known for this species, but it is likely that some undocumented problems exist. Some dolphins are known to be killed in directed fisheries in the Caribbean and incidentally in nets throughout most parts of the range (in particular, West Africa). There has been essentially no work on environmental contaminants in this species. Clymene dolphins have not been held captive, except for some animals that were held temporarily after stranding alive.

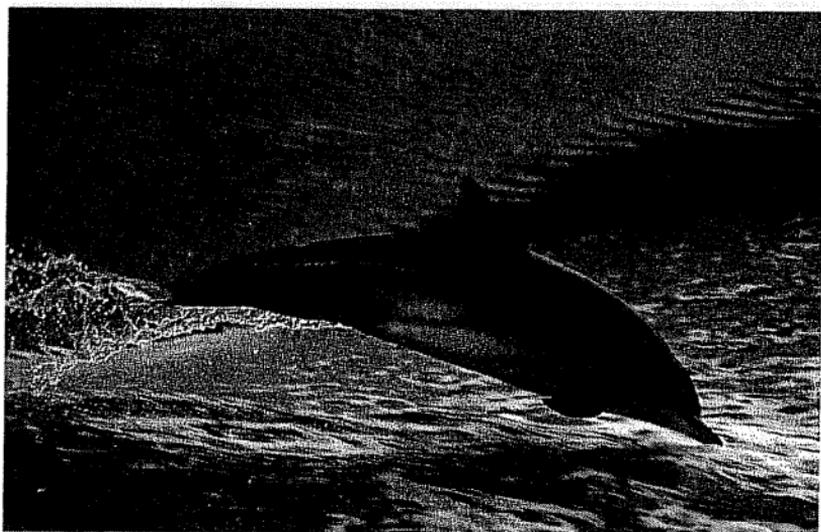


Figure 3 *Clymene dolphins are active and acrobatic animals, often leaping and spinning. Photo by Barbara E. Curry.*

See Also the Following Articles

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