



“In Their World...  
On Their Terms...”

PHOTO: LIAH MCPHERSON

# COVID and Long-Term Dolphin Research in the Bahamas

This year was a challenge in numerous ways, both personally and professionally. As we approached our 36th consecutive season in the Bahamas, we knew it would be a juggle. Much of what we do during our field work is really gathering yearly baseline information on life history data including pregnancies,

new calves, health status, and relationships. In early July the Bahamas finally opened up its borders and we did manage to get out for two field trips until the Bahamas closed its borders once more due to COVID. Never in the history of WDP have we had less than 70 summer field days. That's really the minimum amount of time we need to observe our resident dolphins and document their status. So, this year, our data is quite lacking. And although we are still hoping to get out late this fall if the borders open again and if weather permits, we mourn the loss of continuity. Oh, we have had some really bad hurricane years, where storm after storm kept chasing us back to Florida. And we have had some late starts to our normal May schedule due to boat work in the yard. But never have we been shut out due to a virus for almost the entire summer. In mid-October we get the first cool fronts of the season and along with these come switching wind direction. This is what makes it so difficult to get across the Gulf Stream. So, although we will try for some

late fall trips if the Bahamas opens up, we still have things that will be hard to recover from the lost field season.

- Pregnancies and calving success: Although we don't always see every female that was pregnant in the previous year, we were especially excited to have over a dozen females in our group pregnant in 2019. Spotted dolphins are visually pregnant at about 5-6 months, so we often know who to expect to see with a new calf the following season. If we don't see a calf the following year, it is sometimes hard to tell if the female had a calf and lost it, or did not come to term. Females can go immediately into estrus and get pregnant quickly if they lose a calf, so it's tricky to calculate sometimes.

- Social Associations: Because of the continuing displacement of our LBB resident dolphins to GBB, we are carefully monitoring their integration, or lack thereof. A bit of a natural experiment, documenting the emigration and immigration process is

unique in our field site and will lend itself to insights yet understood.

- Color phases: Spotted dolphins can rapidly gain spots both as older calves moving into their juvenile years, and when female dolphins come into maturity. Although we are good at tracking ID marks, losing a year in the field makes this process much more difficult.

- Health: Every year we monitor the state of health of each individual dolphin. Are they skinny? Do they have any skin diseases or other problems? Given the health of the oceans these are serious factors to monitor. We also take note of the health of the habitat including coral bleaching and sea grass die offs. Given the large displacement of resident dolphins over the last 5 years, we worry that some of these shifts are permanent, leaving the dolphins to struggle for their food.

It's a hard but realistic fact

(continued on page 3)



PHOTO: LIAH MCPHERSON

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



**I**t is my privilege to continue to serve as President of The Wild Dolphin Project's Board of Directors and to enjoy a front row seat as Dr. Herzing and her team break new ground in the study of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins "In Their World... On Their Terms."

At the end of each field season, when things start to settle down from a summer at sea, we can take some time to reflect upon the achievements and breakthroughs made by Dr. Herzing and her team. During the 2020 field season, however, we were not exempt from the significant setbacks experienced by many businesses, individuals, and non-profits as a result of COVID-19.

Although our work is done in the wild, we are in Bahamian waters and fall under the jurisdiction of the Bahamian government while we are there. The Bahamas closed to all non-essential visitors and consequently our field season was reduced from the usual nine trips to only two.

Unfortunately, this put some of our most exciting projects on hold. After several challenging years, continuous improvements and extensive testing of each new iteration, the underwater wearable computer we call Cetacean Hearing Augmentation Telemetry (C.H.A.T.) was finally ready to go for the 2020 field season. This device will allow us to make further strides into the complex world of dolphin communication. We will continue to test and improve the device in the off-season and will be ready to put it into action in the 2021 field season. I continue to be excited to see what insights we will be able to gain through the use of this new technology in 2021 and beyond.

Similarly, Ecological Acoustic Recorders (E.A.R.s) were a new tool first deployed during the 2018 field season. These devices, deployed in our study area, allow us to listen 24/7 and learn about the acoustics of the dolphins that are resident to that area. The 2018 & 2019 deployments yielded terrific results and we look forward to increasing the number of devices and consequently the coverage area in 2021.

It wasn't all bad news in 2020! The extended downtime allowed us to make some much-needed improvements to our most valuable tool ... The R/V Stenella. We were able to upgrade some of her most vital systems, navigation equipment, and some of the comforts that make life at sea possible for the team.

We look forward to continued advancements in our research through technology and the commitment of our team in 2021.

**Axel Stepan**  
Board of Directors,  
President





# WHEN IT COMES TO DOLPHIN BEHAVIOR, -WE DON'T WANT TO MISS A THING!

For the past 16 years I've been amazed by the Atlantic spotted dolphin's incredible intelligence, vocalizations, speed, agility, curiosity, and their constant close physical interactions with each other.

Almost as amazing is Dr. Herzing and our researcher's ability to capture the lives of these wild dolphins using underwater video cameras as their primary research tool. How does Dr. Herzing and Cassie Rusche decide what to focus on with all the dolphins swirling around everywhere at once? It's a tough job. They have to swim fast, keep track of dolphins in their peripheral vision, make mental notes, and make sure their cameras are on and aimed. Most often they capture the predominant and novel behaviors and vocalizations, but they can't record it all...

## Or can they?

Dolphins live and move around in a liquid 360° environment. So, what if we used a 360° underwater camera to capture all of the dolphins, and all of their behaviors within visual range at once?

A year and a half ago a colleague of Dr. Herzing, Dr.

Matthias Hoffmann-Kuhnt, and I went mountain-biking. Matthias showed me his new 360° video camera and mounted it to his handlebars. Later, when I saw the footage, I knew what I had to do!

I quickly bought 2 of the next generation 360° video cameras along with their underwater housings and built several different mounts for them. Dr. Herzing had a special request for a mount that would "hang" in the water column so that when a cameraperson released it at around 20' it could record the dolphins from mid-water, capturing them in their 360° world. That means the camera, housing, and mount had to be neutrally buoyant varying from 15' to 30' depth, which is not an easy task. It took me months, a lot of work, calculations using Archimedes' Principal of Buoyancy, experimentation, and some good advice from Dr. Hoffmann-Kuhnt to perfect.

The rock-solid stable footage that it captures of all the dolphins, all their behavior, and environment is nothing less than stunning from a research and esthetic perspective!

How does it work? The researcher watching the video sees it as if she is there in the

center of the action again, she can look in any direction that she wants, and even zoom in using a computer and mouse or mobile device. She can track the behavior of one dolphin, or a group of dolphins and can create a separate video of that behavior. Then she can go back to the beginning of the video and follow a different dolphin or group of dolphins, then another, and another, again, & again. Searching and re-searching for

new information, answers, and discoveries.

Stay tuned! With 360° underwater cameras we're able to see more of the dolphin's lives than ever before!

You won't want to miss a thing!

**Drew Mayer**  
Vice President  
Resident Technologist  
Member Board of Directors



PHOTO: AXEL STEPAN

## Research Director's Report *from page 1*

to keep in mind that nature has a way of putting us in our place. As humans we are still mammals, making us susceptible to bacteria and viruses. Dolphins too are susceptible to viruses, including the morbillivirus that has taken hold at various times in the last decade and wiped out small communities of dolphins around the globe. As the seas heat up, and as pollution and climate change continues to weaken the health of the oceans, we can continue to expect more whales stranding, more algae blooms, more red tide, more melting ice caps and more hurricanes.

Nature is shouting at us, but are we listening? The health of the planet is intertwined with our own health. If we don't come to realize this soon, we will be our own undoing. But there are many groups and individuals working very hard, around the globe, both with local communities and governments to call attention and action to this issue. Please make your voice heard to policy makers both locally and nationally. Think Global, Act Local.

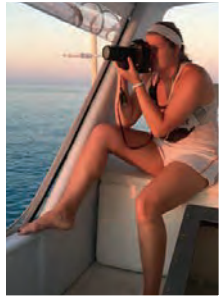
**Dr. Denise Herzing**  
Research Director, WDP



PHOTO: LIAH MCPHERSON

# 2020 FIELD SEASON RECAP

The summer months have already come and gone! This summer's field season was unique and challenging; however, we were able to squeeze in two very productive research trips to the Bahamas. During these two trips we had good behavioral encounters, new calves, and some surprise sightings!



the dolphins made it through Dorian, which stalled for a few days over our study site. Our first trip of the 2020 field season started on the first of July when The Bahamas officially opened for travel. We began up on Little Bahama Bank (LBB), where Hurricane Dorian decided to stall, and found some curious and playful bottlenose dolphins.

The last time we were over in the Bahamas was late last September when we ran some hurricane relief supplies to the people of Grand Bahama Island after Hurricane Dorian. During that short trip we observed a few spotted dolphins including one calf. It was a good sign since it suggests that some of

There were five adult bottlenose dolphins in this encounter, and we identified all of them. Since these were five previously known bottlenose dolphins to WDP, it was another great sign that the dolphins fared well after Hurricane Dorian. Out of the five, two were especially curious. Nightmare, an adult

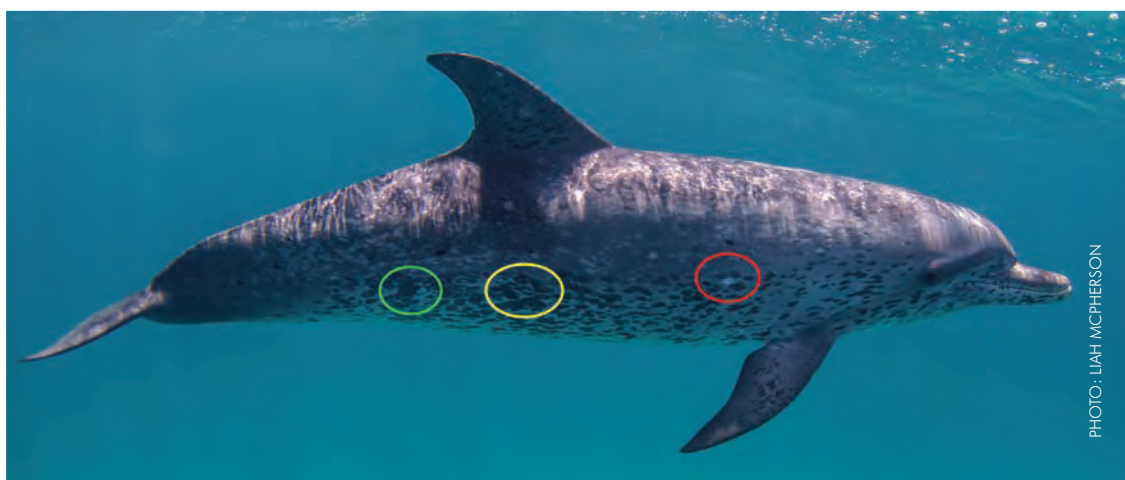
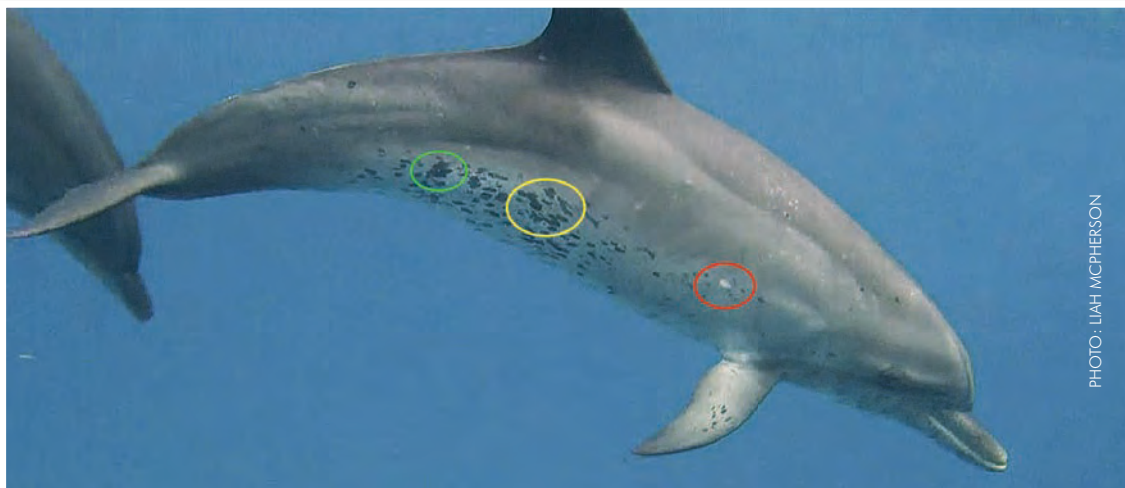
male, and Koala, a young adult female, buzzed our free-diving fins multiple times and turned upside down to check us out. Since 50% of the spotted dolphin population moved down to Bimini (GBB) in 2013, we have not spent a lot of field time up on LBB. Many of us now use the longer free-diving fins to make swimming against currents and just overall swimming in the ocean easier. With all the interest in and buzzing of our free-diving fins, we wondered if these longer fins were new to the bottlenose dolphins?

During the first trip, we also had a good aggressive encounter filled with behavioral displays and interspersed with some courtship behaviors. It was a long encounter with a large group of mainly adult male spotted dolphins with

some female spotted dolphins on the periphery. The dominant behavior was aggression, which included some head-to-head displays, tail slaps and open mouth behavior, and a lot of vocalizations. During the courtship behavior, the males synchronized their buzzes (a type of vocalization) as they chased after the females.

Most of the encounters for Trip 2 were short, but the last encounter of this trip was filled with sargassum games and curious dolphins. Two juvenile male spotted dolphins broke from their traveling behavior and began to play keep away with some sargassum. Multiple times the humans dove down with sargassum, dropped it, and the young spotted dolphins grabbed the sargassum and then circled around the humans all the way back up to the surface. It was a very interactive encounter and scientists believe play behavior is an important part of development in any young animal's life. It's been suggested that play behavior teaches cooperation, strengthens bonds that might help form alliances later in life, and may also be a time when young dolphins learn proper social skills. So, even though we as researchers enjoy these seemingly carefree interactions they are just as important as some of the other behaviors we observe and record.

Aside from those three behaviorally rich encounters, we also acquired some new IDs during these two trips as well. We spent the majority of the two trips down on GBB since we have a better chance of encountering dolphins. We saw a total of three new GBB calves, two males and one female. The male calves were named Modolla and Swamp! Modolla's mom is Mila, a young adult spotted dolphin, and Swamp's mom is Suey, a juvenile spotted dolphin. The new female calf was named Aquila and is the daughter of the adult female Aquarius. If you recall from our 2019 Newsletter, I reported that we had 19 pregnant female



Top: Emerald from 2016 showing the spots used to make the ID (right side) Bottom: Emerald from 2020 showing the spots used to make the ID (right side)



spotted dolphins in the summer of 2019. Of those 19 females, we saw a total of 9 and three had new calves with them as I have already mentioned. That means that we did not see 10 of these previously pregnant females. Did they have new calves? Are these new calves males or females? Unfortunately, we will not know until we can get back out to the Bahamas, which may not be until next year. Waiting until next year poses a problem because by next season some of these calves will be a little more independent. This independence may make it difficult to figure out whom the mother is unless we see them on multiple occasions or if we see the calf nursing. Another issue is that calves have a 25% mortality rate during their first year, causing us to possibly miss a calf attributed to a certain female. As you can see, missing a field season can result in some important data lost.

While down on GBB we also saw an individual that we have not seen in four years! It took some work trying to ID her because she had gained so many new spots. Check out the side-by-side photos of this dolphin we have named Emerald, to see the spots we matched up from ID photos taken in 2016 compared to 2020. As you can see, she gained a lot of spots in just 4 years! This individual is proof that obtaining ID photos every year of each individual is needed to accurately track each dolphin throughout its lifetime. There are times when we might assume a calf (0-3 year-old spotted dolphin with no spots) is lost, to then have an unknown juvenile in the population four years later. If that calf had no defining marks, we label it as a new individual unless genetic confirmation can be made, and that's dependent on whether or not we obtained a fecal sample from that animal. This example just shows how hard tracking individuals in a population can be and how important photo ID work is. To some people, it may look like we are just taking beautiful pictures of dolphins, but to our work the uniqueness of the individual is vital.

GBB also provided us with a few surprise sightings. During the first trip we found Tristan, a young adult female spotted dolphin, who we just saw up on LBB last summer. Then during the second trip we found a

mom-calf pair down on GBB, Summer and Spring, who were last seen in 2018 up on LBB. So, it appears that the spotted dolphins are still moving around the sandbanks since their major displacement in 2013.

In regards to our study populations as a whole, we saw 50% of our GBB Atlantic spotted dolphins and only 15% of our LBB Atlantic spotted dolphins. Keep in mind that these percentages seem low, but we only had two trips this summer as opposed to our normal nine trips. We only spent two days up on LBB and in those two days we found bottlenose dolphins as mentioned previously, however, we did not find any spotted dolphins. It is hard to find the spotted dolphins up on LBB these days, since there are so few of them and as we saw this summer, still more of them are leaving that sandbank. In 2013 a large portion of the spotted dolphin population moved down to GBB we believe because of a food crash on LBB. According to data from NOAA, the surface chlorophyll up on the LBB sandbank decreased. Chlorophyll is a proxy for phytoplankton and phytoplankton is at the bottom of the food chain. When the bottom of the food chain declines, a food crash or collapse can happen. We believe this resulted in a decline in the availability of spotted dolphin fish prey species forcing them to find food elsewhere, which is why they moved to GBB. So, we wonder, how many more LBB spotted dolphins would we have seen on GBB if we would have had our full research season? This is a stark reminder of why field time is so precious.

Since our summer season was shortened, we are hoping to squeeze in one more trip before the end of the year to get more data. We usually limit our field season to the months of May-September because of the hurricane season and after that the winds change direction and are stronger during the winter, making a Gulf Stream crossing much harder. Hopefully things will line up and we can make our way over to the Bahamas one more time before 2021.

Thanks for reading!

**Cassie Rusche**  
Research Assistant

## INTERN REPORT

### How I got involved with the Wild Dolphin Project.



PHOTO: RUTH PETZOLD

The journey I'm now on, started on the benches of my high school's soccer field. I was talking about my interests in the marine world with some friends and low and behold, behind me was former WDP research assistant, Nic Mader. She intervened in the conversation and the rest is history.

I began doing surveys with the Dolphin Ecology Project in the Indian River Lagoon and surrounding areas. With this ongoing project, I learned to track, record and collect necessary data to ensure the health and wellbeing of the local Florida dolphin populations. Through our many hours spent on the boat, sometimes with no dolphins in sight, stories from the past arose. I was informed that Nic was Dr. Herzing's research assistant for about a decade. As I learned more and more about the WDP and their mission, I knew I wanted to get involved.

I reached out to the project, wondering if they had any opportunities or needed any help over the summer. Within a matter of days, Executive Assistant Melissa and Research Assistant Cassie responded offering me a spot on one of the summer field trips. I immediately responded with an exclamatory yes! After numerous emails back and forth, I was put on trip #1 as intern/cook. I was given the opportunity to pursue both of my passions: one, to research wild dolphins and two, to cook for a large number of people. As I am only a college freshman attending Florida Atlantic University, receiving this opportunity straight out of high school meant the world to me.

My first glimpse of life on the Stenella was when I met my fellow crew members for a full day of provisioning. When we arrived back at the boat after a long day of shopping, I wondered how my 6'9" self would fit in a kitchen that was no wider than I was long, I'm serious! But I was determined to make it work. As everyone is well aware, due to the pandemic, The Bahamas closed their borders to international travel so that wasn't an option. But this didn't stop us from making the most out of the trip. Instead of traveling west towards The Bahamas, we headed south because we were bound for the Florida Keys... well almost. The unforeseen bad weather kept us inshore for two nights before we ventured out into the turbulent sea. With Captain Brad's knowledge and expertise, and First Mate Tyler's unwavering support, we found a small window to head south. It was a rough day but we managed to make it down in about 12 hours while battling waves, currents and wind. I spent most of that day sick as a dog, but wrestled enough balance and strength to prepare an excellent dinner. Did I mention that was the only day we saw a dolphin!? It was a lone bottlenose dolphin who surfaced a few times and then went on its way.

As cook, my days began at 6am with, first and foremost, getting the coffee started. I would then cut some fresh fruit and put out some small breakfast items. Menus rotated every day with a hot dish present for breakfast on most days which included some mix of scrambled eggs, omelets, pancakes, French toast and the occasional breakfast meat. Lunches were comprised of leftovers from the night before and traditional lunch foods. Dinner on the other hand was where I really got creative. Some nights I cooked Polynesian fried rice while others I cooked Greek food. Then for desert, I went all out one evening and whipped up a dish of bananas foster, always a crowd pleaser!

When I wasn't in the kitchen, I had the chance to snorkel the beautiful reefs in the Keys. Dr. Herzing noted the health of the reefs and how the mooring ball system has aided in the health of these marine sanctuaries. When I wasn't on the reefs, I wanted to take the opportunity to gain exposure with the dolphin work. During the evenings, I went through dolphin ID books, attempted to learn spot patterns, and discussed any scientific projects currently underway with my fellow crew members. In just a few days, I learned a lot and knew I had to return for more experience. To stay involved during the off-season, I am currently working in the WDP office putting together a Florida photo ID catalog. This ID catalog is documenting the Florida wild dolphins off the eastern coast. I thank the Wild Dolphin Project so much for this opportunity and can't wait to see what the future holds!

**Liam Groth**, Florida Atlantic University

## CAPTAIN'S CORNER



Hey there Wild Dolphin Project fans, it's Captain Brad here with the 2020 edition of the Captain's Corner. As we all know, this has been a strange year for everyone. But we haven't let that stop us from adapting and making the best of what was available to us. As the season was set to kickoff, the Bahamas shut down their borders. This brought things to a halt and forced us to reevaluate our options and come up with new strategies.

Without the ability to travel to our study site right away, we turned our focus to our home waters off Florida. With the warm waters of the Gulf Stream passing so closely to our coast, South Florida is known to be exceptional for all types of marine life (including

dolphins). We have spent time over the years in the offseason surveying the Florida coast and exploring these fantastic waters that we call home. However, during the off-season, we are often sidelined by boat projects that keep us from exploring with any real consistency. This year, with the boat in "season-ready" shape we decided to set our sights on our home waters.

For our first trip of the season, we decided to head down to the beautiful John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, located in the crystal clear waters off Key Largo. We spent a whole day cruising down, passing the skyscrapers of Miami as we went. We finally arrived and anchored up behind a beautiful little mangrove island called Rodriguez Key. This would be our home for the next week but every morning when we pulled anchor, we headed out to a new reef. These protected reef sanctuaries really lived up to the hype! First on our list was Molasses Reef, where we saw an abundance of turtles and towering coral heads. Making it unique was the way that it had a deep-water section of tall coral heads for us free-divers and shallow sections (about 10' or less) full of small rock formations and small fish were nice for those who prefer to remain and observe from the surface. We checked out so many amazing spots on this trip from the famed

Christ of the Abyss statue, to Pickles Reef, to Grecian Rocks and so many others. I would highly recommend this trip to anyone! Check out our website to charter a cruise with us on R/V Stenella and experience it for yourself!

As much fun as the Florida Keys were, we finally got the clearance to head to the Bahamas and do our field work. We got our health checks and Bahamian authorization and we headed over with our passengers on July 1st. Knowing that we could be limited on time, we spent longer days working our study sites and it paid off. The first few days were slow with just a sighting here and there, but as we started dialing in on where we were seeing dolphins and focusing our attention in those areas. After that, we had multiple sightings a day with different dolphins. As this trip came to an end the hope for a great season was high with the whole crew.

When we returned to the States after completing only two trips to the Bahamas, we realized the 2020 season ended as fast as it began. Once again we found ourselves trying to decide what to do next. Again, we turned our sights to our local waters and decided to do multiple dolphin surveys along the Florida coast. We searched from Palm Beach Inlet to the Northern tip of Palm Beach County. In the past we

have noted both bottlenose and spotted dolphins, as well as other mega fauna species such as turtles, large rays, sharks, and even billfish. I hope everyone continues to appreciate our local marine life. Please remember to support the Wild Dolphin Project and perhaps a trip to the Florida Keys is in your future.

Until next year Wild Dolphin Project fans...

**Captain Brad Ruda**



1. Captain Brad Ruda 2. Liah McPherson swimming near the Christ of the Abyss statue 3. RV Stenella anchored at Molasses Reef during a charter to the Florida Keys



# 2021 BAHAMAS TRIPS



**W**e are looking forward to continuing our work studying and observing Atlantic spotted and bottlenose dolphins next summer, which will be our 37th consecutive year in the field! We invite you to learn the how's and why's of our non-invasive approach, learn about their natural behavior and sounds, their relationships, and their lives in the wild. You can assist our research team in studying and observing natural dolphin behavior both above and underwater, and enjoy presentations and lectures given in the evening. All trips leave from West Palm Beach, Florida on a Tuesday morning and return 9 days later on Wednesday afternoon. A full-time cook is aboard ensuring everyone is well fed and hydrated as some dolphin encounters can be lengthy and can happen multiple times throughout the day.

**For more information please visit:**

[wilddolphinproject.org/participate/bahamas-trip](http://wilddolphinproject.org/participate/bahamas-trip)



## Are you ready to join us?

Students currently enrolled in high school or college with an interest in marine biology can participate in our internship program. Include documentation that you are currently a student (i.e. current class schedule, student ID card, unofficial transcript, etc.) with your initial email. Intern responsibilities are to conduct daily dolphin watches on the bridge, assist the research team with logging data, underwater photography and photo identification processing.

**For more information please visit:**

[wilddolphinproject.org/participate/student-internship-opportunities](http://wilddolphinproject.org/participate/student-internship-opportunities)



## 2021 FIELD SEASON SCHEDULE

Trip	<b>1</b>	May
Trip	<b>2</b>	May
Trip	<b>3</b>	June
Trip	<b>4</b>	June
Trip	<b>5</b>	July
Trip	<b>6</b>	July
Trip	<b>7</b>	August
Trip	<b>8</b>	August
Trip	<b>9</b>	September

\*\*\* Dates to be Announced \*\*\*

**Melissa Williams**

Wild Dolphin Project, Trip Coordinator

561.575.5660

[wdptrips@wilddolphinproject.org](mailto:wdptrips@wilddolphinproject.org)

## Research Vessel *Stenella* is available for charter!

You may arrange a private trip for your friends and family or use our vessel as a floating classroom to offer a hands-on learning experience for your students.

Our 62' live aboard catamaran accommodates (6) guests with a fully air-conditioned interior, private heads, a fully equipped galley and features a large aft deck and elevated flying bridge.

Get unplugged from the demands of the world! Explore Florida's coastal reefs and natural wonders during the day and revel in the spectacular sunsets and starlit skies at night.

Read a blog online for this year's trip to the Florida Keys [wilddolphinproject.org/our-research/research-vessel](http://wilddolphinproject.org/our-research/research-vessel). To download a brochure and find more specifications including a walk-through video of R/V *Stenella*, visit [wilddolphinproject.org/our-research/research-vessel](http://wilddolphinproject.org/our-research/research-vessel).

**Call (561) 575-5660 or email [info@wilddolphinproject.org](mailto:info@wilddolphinproject.org)** to get a quote and prepare a plan for your special group.



Snorkeling Molasses Reef during a charter to the Florida Keys

# 2020 EVENTS



Melissa Williams and Cassie Rusche at Hard Exercise Works



Nic Mader, Dr. Denise Herzing, and Kiele Mader at the Lyric Theatre

On **THURSDAY, JANUARY 16TH**, we attended the premier of the H2O Trickle Down Exhibition at the Lighthouse Art Center in Tequesta, Florida, which featured art and photography from Ruth Petzold Photography, Tom Fitz, and more. Dr. Denise Herzing presented an overview of WDP for approximately 100 guests.

On **FRIDAY, JANUARY 31ST**, Research Director and Founder, Dr. Denise Herzing presented "Dolphins in the Wild: Cracking the Code" to a packed house at the Lyric Theatre in Stuart, Florida. This was a free event thanks to The Environmental Studies Council.

On **SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 29TH**, a local gym, Hard Exercise Works in Boca Raton, Florida teamed up with WDP for a charity workout called "Deadlift for Dolphins". These "Hew-man" athletes enjoyed a brief overview of the project and had a chance to scoop up new WDP merchandise afterwards.

On **TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2020** Research Assistant, Cassie Rusche presented "An Overview of The Wild Dolphin Project" for South Florida Underwater Photography Society. Visit [sfups.org](http://sfups.org) for more about this organization.

News

## Denise Herzing Earns Sea Hero Honors for Bahamas Dolphin Research



Spending 35 years with a single group of dolphins makes clear how their world—and our—is changing.



**SCUBA**  
DIVING

By Scuba Diving Editors  
July 6, 2020



## WILD OCEAN SCIENCE POSTPONED

Like you, we were terribly disappointed to postpone our annual event due to the worldwide pandemic. In March, the first positive cases had popped up here in Florida and soon after that restrictions were enacted to limit large group gatherings. No one was certain how the future would unfold from there.

### What will Wild Ocean Science look like in 2021?

Responses from our survey gave us a mixed bag of feelings towards a live in-person event versus an online virtual event. Although

everyone was looking forward to meeting world-renowned Oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle and attending her presentation in-person, many didn't feel comfortable being in proximity to others quite yet. And while a virtual event could reach across the globe, we lose out in meeting and getting to know our supporters personally.

### So what's the plan?

With Wild Ocean Science being our one big fundraiser for the year, it seems that a hybrid event is the way to go for now. Ideally, an optimal event will encompass many aspects we've enjoyed in the past such as highlighting our featured presenter and giving guests an opportunity to learn more about our mission and



recent innovations, as well as offer interactive elements and creating memorable moments.

Like so many others both professionally and personally, we are navigating new territory here in 2020 and appreciate your continued support.

### Stay tuned!

The best way to keep up with Wild Ocean Science announcements and all WDP news is to subscribe to our e-newsletter. We'll send monthly updates right to your inbox so that you won't miss a thing.

Subscribe here:  
[www.wilddolphinproject.org/membership/e-newsletter](http://www.wilddolphinproject.org/membership/e-newsletter)





# DRILLING NEAR DOLPHINS

There is a big push from environmentalists, ocean enthusiasts, and wildlife preservation groups to stop drilling for oil in the Bahamas before it begins. This activity is dangerous for both short term and long term health of the dolphins, the reefs, and the Bahamian people. An oil spill also potentially impacts the U.S. coast as well since the Gulf Stream runs along our coast. Bahamas Petroleum Company holds 100% of (5) exploration licenses. Four of which are located in the southern territories of the

Bahamas, and the fifth is in the Northern Bahamas.

## *You can make a difference.*

Stena IceMAX, one of the most advanced drill ships in the world, is scheduled to arrive in Bahamian waters on December 15th and spudding of the Perseverance #1 Well is expected to begin before the end of this year. This is extremely concerning and has major implications to all marine life in our study area and

also along the South Florida coastline.

There is a petition on [change.org](https://change.org) to cancel all existing oil exploration licenses, reject all proposed renewals, and impose a permanent ban on fossil fuel exploration anywhere in the Bahamas maritime borders.

## *Go one step further.*

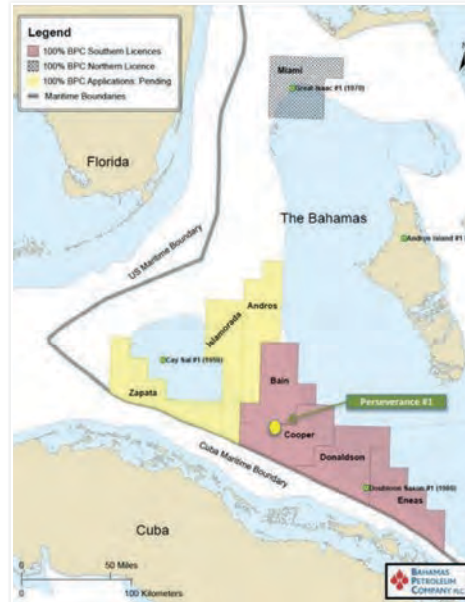
Our Islands Our Future is grouping us together to make our collective voice even louder. By uniting our efforts and resources, we hope to make a greater impact. We urge you to not only sign the petition as an individual but join them as a partner.



[ourislandsourfuture.org](https://ourislandsourfuture.org)

We encourage any organization or business invested in the Bahamas or Florida that may be impacted by an oil spill in the Bahamas, to please join in the fight. And, share this cause with like-minded friends and other businesses (diving, fishing, tourism).

Thank you for your help!



Left: This image was created by graduate student, Brittini Hill, illustrating the startling proximity of the Northern lease to known home ranges of dolphins in our study area. Right: Data from Lamda's satellite tag indicates he travelled south along the Southern Lease Territory near Cay Sal after his stranding, rehabilitation and release back into the wild in 2018. A peer-reviewed scientific paper with the findings will be published soon. Lamda's story can be found on our Blogs and YouTube channel.

# Holiday Gift Sets

Scan Here  
To Visit  
Our Store



The best gifts come in the mail! Start your holiday shopping today and send a WDP gift set directly to the dolphin lovers in your family. From t-shirts and tumblers to a large metal print, every gift set includes WDP extras such as Dr. Herzog's book, "The Wild Dolphin Project: Long-term Research of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins in the Bahamas", postcards to show your support of our project, and a personalized holiday card signed by our team. This delightful package can be personalized and sent directly to someone you love this holiday season.



# Memberships

As a member of the Wild Dolphin Project you get a free coffee table book from Dr. Denise Herzing, a newsletter, and first priority when signing up for summer trips! Whether you are looking to possibly participate onboard R/V Stenella or just stay updated on the project, our research, and upcoming events, a WDP membership will benefit you.

**NEONATE** – \$35 - WDP Book

**TWO TONE** – \$75 - WDP Book & T-shirt

**SPECKLED** – \$250 - WDP Book & T-shirt, invites for Florida work day trips

**MOTTLED** – \$500 - WDP Book & T-shirt, invites for Florida research trips, meet and greet with project updates

**FUSED** – \$1,000-WDP Book & T-shirt, invites for Florida research day trips, meet and greet with project updates, intracoastal day trip on R/V Stenella

**STEWARD** – \$2,500 - WDP Book & T-shirt, meet and greet with project updates, invites for Florida research day trips, intracoastal day trip for 2 on R/V Stenella

**AMBASSADOR** – \$5,000 - WDP Book & T-shirt, meet and greet with project updates, invites for Florida research day trips, intracoastal day trip for 4 on R/V Stenella

**GENERATION** – \$10,000 - WDP Book & T-shirt, invites for Florida research trips, meet and greet with project updates, invites for Florida research day trips, intracoastal day trip for up to 6 on R/V Stenella

## Corporate Giving

**CORPORATE GIVING** allows us to recognize your support both in our newsletter and on our website with a click through feature from your company logo.

**Supporter** - \$100 – recognition in newsletter and website

**Sponsor** - \$250 - recognition in newsletter and website, and receive a t-shirt

**Patron** - \$500 - recognition in newsletter and website, and receive a t-shirt

**Benefactor** - \$1,000 - recognition in newsletter and website, receive a t-shirt, invited to join Florida work days and meet and greets with project updates

**Top Sponsor** - \$5,000 - recognition in newsletter and website, receive a t-shirt, invited to join Florida workdays and meet and greets with project updates, and an Intracoastal day trip aboard R/V Stenella.

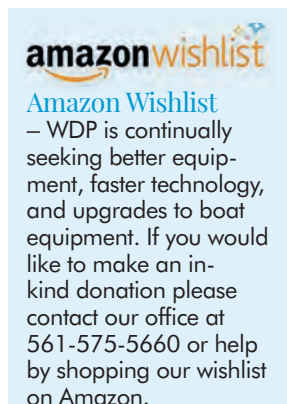
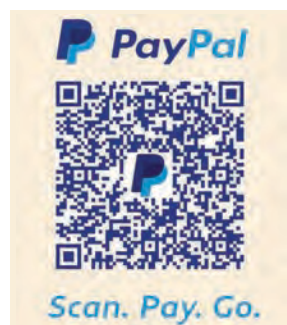
## Ways to Support our Research

**Benevity** – The global leader in online work place giving, matching, volunteering and grant management solutions, Benevity's award-winning solutions to power their Goodness Programs and corporate philanthropy, helping them attract, retain and engage today's workers by connecting people personally to causes that matter to them.

**Facebook Fundraisers** – a fun way for friends and family to celebrate your birthday by donating to a charity that you care about. Set up a birthday fundraiser and help share the mission and the vision of WDP.

**Workplace Matching Programs** – Many corporations offer a gift-matching incentive where they match your donations to your favorite charity up to a certain amount. Usually, it's simply a form to fill out within a year of the date you donated. Your HR department will have guidelines and instructions.

**Stock Donations** – Get the full value of donated stock and avoid the tax on capital gains. Your broker can easier transfer stock from your account directly to WDP. You can download the form from our website or please contact our office for specific instructions.



**Merchandise** – The new line of WDP t-shirts feature dolphins in different age classes. The crew neck tee in Royal Blue features 3 dolphins from our study areas, notably Amanda and in the echelon position is her calf, Astro. The v-neck tee in Tahiti blue features a pair of dolphins in the two-tone age class. The Tahiti Blue tank top features a juvenile dolphin in the "speckled" age class. Did you know that by the age of 4, dolphins have gained black spots on their ventral side? Also by this time, they likely have a new sibling and are no longer the main focus of their mother.

Get your "good to know" facts about dolphins while supporting our research. Your purchases help support our mission to study free-ranging Atlantic spotted dolphins "In Their World... On Their Terms."

**Scan Here To Visit Our Store**



### We have new merchandise!





# Thanks to All Our Sponsors, Foundations and Members

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## Ambassador Members

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## Project Staff

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Brad Ruda,  
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Cassie Rusche,  
Research Assistant  
  
Michelle Green, Ph.D.,  
Research Associate  
  
Cindy Elliser, Ph.D.,  
Research Associate  
  
Bethany Augliere,  
Research Associate

## Website:

[www.WildDolphinProject.org](http://www.WildDolphinProject.org)

## General Email:

[info@wilddolphinproject.org](mailto:info@wilddolphinproject.org)

## Trip Information Email:

[wdptrips@wilddolphinproject.org](mailto:wdptrips@wilddolphinproject.org)

## Twitter:

[@dolphinproject](https://twitter.com/dolphinproject)

## Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/  
WildDolphinProject](http://www.facebook.com/WildDolphinProject)

## Instagram:

[www.instagram.com/  
WildDolphinProject](http://www.instagram.com/WildDolphinProject)

## YouTube:

[WildDolphinProject](https://www.youtube.com/WildDolphinProject)

## The Wild Dolphin Project

P.O. Box 8436, Jupiter, FL 33468  
Telephone: 561-575-5660  
Fax: 561-277-2442



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The Wild  
Dolphin  
PROJECT



Research, Education, Conservation  
*A nonprofit organization*

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USE  
CYCLE  
THINK  
EACH OUT

Practice the 5 R's

Start by recycling this newsletter, give it to a friend!

## 2021 Individual Membership

All new/renewing members will receive a complimentary coffee table book, newsletter, and first priority when signing up for trips!

- ☐ \$35 ..... Neonate membership
- ☐ \$75 ..... Two-toned membership
- ☐ \$250 ..... Speckled membership
- ☐ \$500 ..... Mottled membership
- ☐ \$1,000 ..... Fused membership
- ☐ \$2,500 ..... Steward membership
- ☐ \$5,000 ..... Ambassador membership
- ☐ \$10,000+ ..... Generation membership
- ☐ other \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Yes, please send me my membership gifts

(optional) I'd like to make this donation:

- ☐ On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ In memory of \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Please send acknowledgement of this gift to: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Please check here if you wish to receive future newsletters by email only

## 2021 Corporate Membership

You can also become a member online! Visit [www.wilddolphinproject.org](http://www.wilddolphinproject.org) and click on "Donate/Support WDP" to sign up as a new/renewing member.

- ☐ \$100 ..... Corporate supporter
- ☐ \$250 ..... Corporate sponsor
- ☐ \$500 ..... Corporate patron
- ☐ \$1,000 ..... Corporate benefactor
- ☐ \$5,000+ ..... Corporate top sponsor

As a WDP corporate partner you will:

- be recognized in the newsletter
- be recognized on WDP's website (company logo and website link included)

## Contact Information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Company: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Country: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone/Ext: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### METHOD OF PAYMENT:

- ☐ Check (made out payable to the Wild Dolphin Project)

Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Discover ☐ American Express

### CREDIT CARD INFORMATION:

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
CW Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip Code: (associated w/ credit card) \_\_\_\_\_

### MEMBERSHIP AUTO-RENEWAL:

- ☐ Check here if you would like us to automatically renew your checked membership level each year.
- By checking above, you are allowing us to charge your credit card on file for renewing your membership each year and will provide updated card information should it change.
- If you would like to increase your membership level in the future, please notify us before your membership renewal by emailing [info@wilddolphinproject.org](mailto:info@wilddolphinproject.org).

Donors (names only) will be published in our newsletters, annual reports, etc. If you would like your donation to remain anonymous, please check here: ☐

You can also become a member online! Visit [www.wilddolphinproject.org](http://www.wilddolphinproject.org) and click on "Become a Member / Donate Today" to sign up as a new/renewing member.

Please make checks payable to **The Wild Dolphin Project** and send with this form to P.O. Box 8436, Jupiter, Florida 33468. All donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.