

# Managing of solitary and sociable male dolphin behaviour off Cherbourg in Normandy, France, and in the Channel Islands, U.K.



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from individuals to populations"

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## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "SOLITARY AND SOCIABLE DOLPHINS"?



Photo 1 : "GEORGES-RANDY" in Port-Chantereyne, Cherbourg (november 2001)

The phenomenon of "solitary" dolphins being "sociable" by interacting with humans is today well known with about 70 solitary and sociable dolphins recorded world-wide. Nearly every year, some new wild solitary dolphins appear, allowing close contact with humans.

### How do solitary and sociable dolphins behave during contact with humans?

Solitary and sociable wild dolphins have many typical behaviour patterns in common :

- Closely following boats and approaching boat propellers within centimetres;
- Approaching when people make special noises (e.g. splashing on the water..);
- Investigating all kinds of objects (underwater cameras, masks, torches...);
- Often allowing people to touch them;
- Swimming and diving with people, inviting swimmers to be drawn by the dorsal fin.

### Do solitary and sociable dolphins perform "abnormal" behaviour?

When solitary dolphins are observed closely interacting with humans, they "use", in particular, swimmers and divers as "substitute" for dolphin partners. Therefore, they try to interact with humans in a similar way as they do with conspecifics and just show "normal" dolphin behaviour but adapted to the special situation.

### What are the dangers for wild sociable dolphins and for interacting humans?

Nearly all known sociable dolphins have often been actively pursued and harassed by many people because no managing and protection of the animals has been assured.

#### Dangers for dolphins

To be harassed by boat drivers and swimmers.

To get disturbed in the basic behaviour patterns as foraging and resting.

To be injured or killed by people who are angry about the presence of the dolphin.



Photo 2 : "GEORGES-RANDY" has been injured by a boat propeller.

#### Dangers for humans

To be injured by the dolphin (biting, slapping with the tail).

To be drawn out to the open sea and into dangerous currents with consequential risk to life.

Male dolphins often become aggressive and endanger swimmers because of dominant and sexual behaviour.



Photo 3 : Sexual behaviour of "GEORGES-RANDY".

#### References

1) De Meersman, P. & al. (2002) : Use of a sightings network including professional marine users in the study of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in Normandy, France, 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of European Cetacean Society, April 2002, Liège (Luik), Belgium.

2) Müller, M. (1998) - La place des dauphins solitaires et familiers dans la Socio-écologie des Grands Dauphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) - Thèse de doctorat - Université de Paris VI.

#### Acknowledgements

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## THE CASE OF "GEORGES-RANDY"

### THE FIRST SOLITARY AND SOCIABLE DOLPHIN IN NORMANDY

#### History

"GEORGES-RANDY" is an adult male bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), measuring 2.70 metres in length. He is sexually mature. Since the end of October 2001 until today, he has been observed several times on the French coast of Cotentin and in the Channel Islands (U.K.). Identification photographs have also confirmed that the same animal had been already observed on the coast of Vendée (Ile d'Yeu, Les Sables d'Olonne) during summer 2001 - data of the CRMM, La Rochelle.

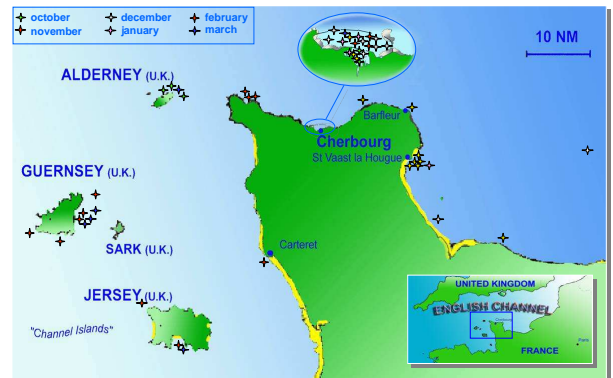


Fig.1. Map of the geographic area used by "Georges-Randy" from 21th October, 2001 to 8th March, 2002 (n=50)

#### Need of a highly performed survey network

The movements and behaviour of "GEORGES-RANDY" are followed up and the dolphin-human interactions are managed thanks to the highly performed survey network "Réseau Régional d'Observateurs de Mammifères Marins"<sup>(1)</sup> founded by the GECC / Normandy in 1997. Installations of military (e.g. "Semafores de la Marine Nationale") and harbour authorities as well as fishermen and other sea users are actively participating at the dolphins survey and informing the GECC about all sightings they do. The Cetacean Section of La Société Guernesaise and La Société Jersiaise survey the Channel Islands area.

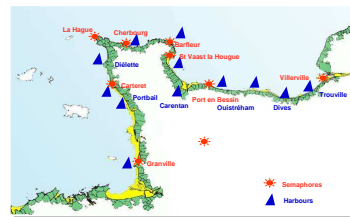


Fig.2. Map of the GECC survey network

#### Need of intelligent and very detailed information and education work

In the case of "GEORGES-RANDY" members of the survey network and media (newspaper, radio and television) are closely co-operating with the GECC and the Cetacean Section of La Société Guernesaise (a similar study group in Guernsey, Channel Islands) to protect the dolphin from human harassment. To assure this protection, the most important task is to inform and educate people who encounter "GEORGES-RANDY" about the rules to respect with this wild animal.

#### A few rules for interaction with "GEORGES-RANDY"

based on "Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society" Code of Conduct and "GECC Réseau Régional d'Observateurs de Mammifères Marins" recommendations.

**Marine mammals are protected by law :  
you are not allowed to disturb or pursue them.**

**KEEP** your distance. Never go closer than 100m (200m if another boat is present). "GEORGES-RANDY" will come to you if he wants to.

**NEVER** drive head on to the dolphin. If unsure of his movement, simply STOP and put the engine into NEUTRAL to prevent from any risk of accident.

**MAINTAIN** a steady direction and NO WAKE speed. DO NOT steer erratically.

**PLEASE** spend no longer than 15 minutes with the dolphin.

**NEVER** try to touch or swim with the dolphin for your safety and his (you may be injured or contaminated, if he is carrying diseases).