

# Hooray for dolphins

The relationship between sailors and nature is a special one and that is particularly true when it comes to dolphins, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** notes

It doesn't matter how many years I have lived at sea, what oceans I've sailed or the lands I've visited, I will never, ever tire of seeing dolphins.

I've encountered them in flat calms, when the very surface of the water is so still that it's merely a window into their world, and the ripples of their leaps and splashes are the only thing to break the mirror image. We once sailed right into a superpod off the coast of Costa Rica. With literally hundreds of individuals spinning, leaping, hurling, jumping and diving all at the same time, so that water became a mass of writhing movement.

We've also met them when a storm hits and the sea is raging, every peak frothing like the mouth of an angry monster. Like the day that our mainsail ripped to shreds and when we paused to inspect and survey the damage we noticed that the wild ocean around us was punctuated by jumping, diving dolphins. Actually, perhaps frolicking, describes it better; we were shocked by the violence and magnitude of the breakage that we had just suffered and the contrast of that with the way in which these free, natural creatures were revelling in their fun was decidedly poignant. "Things break, but life goes on" their constant smiling expressions seemed to say, "Just enjoy the waves, isn't the sea great?"

There are times when their visits to us have been in the dark, making a no-man's-land of a nightwatch suddenly seem more interesting by their phantom clicks and breath keeping us company. Where are they? At the stern? The bow? Midships? Or sometimes, at anchor, we hear the squeals and bubbles against the hull first, amplifying their arrival, which sends us rushing to the steps to get up and spot them. They've sometimes come in the black of night, when we never see the animals themselves, but see only their outlines and trails, light torpedos, as the phosphorescence in the water illuminates their movements.

Just being in their presence makes me feel happy and special. It makes me aware that no one else in the world, at this moment, is seeing this particular group



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or pod of dolphins. That it's only because we are here, on our boat, in the middle of nowhere, that makes us lucky enough to witness them. I've seen that same giddy glee plastered over the faces of our children. Our rules underway of harnesses and tethers are temporarily relaxed for a dolphin sighting and my husband carefully guides each child in turn up to the bow for their own sacred moment of interaction with the beautiful beasts. "I can almost touch it!"; "Look, another one!"; "It's dancing in our bow wave, mama!" each simple peal of delight sends waves of pleasure right through me, as if that very moment somehow justifies or validates a life lived afloat, and the choices we make to get here.

Dolphins seem to like people and love boats. Of course

there are the schools of them that are busy feeding, that you catch only a fleeting glimpse of as you sail by, and they never come to see the boat. Or there are the solitary ones, that allow you only a hint of their whistles, and a flash of their tails, swimming level with your bow for just a mere moment before leaving you alone, curiosity satisfied. But by far the more common meetings are with the groups that seem just as interested in us as we are in them.

I remember one morning at anchor in New Zealand's Bay of islands when I was sipping my tea on deck when I spotted dolphins between our boat and the beach we were anchored off. Almost silently, James summoned each of our kids, donned their lifejacket, and took turns taking each one gently, quietly, on our paddleboard to get just that bit closer. At water level they seem so much bigger and, as the kids returned with eyes like saucers, their voices would tell me in hushed tones, full of reverence, about what they had seen. And all before breakfast on your average weekday on board.

If I ever get blasé about spying them leaping at the bow, or bored of their clicks, squeaks and whistles, then that's the moment I will step off the boat. Because if I fail to be moved by their carefree, happy magic then I should shove over and let someone else witness that wonderful mixture of play and grace.



**JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN**

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at [water-log.com](http://water-log.com)

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