Humpback Dolphin (Sousa spp.)

Distribution: Coastal waters of Africa, Australia and Asia (see map below and full list of countries in the detailed species account online at: https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/species/humpback-dolphin)

The base or hump on the back under the dorsal fin may take up as much as 1/3 of the body length. Dorsal fin shape can vary, but always sits on top of a very broad base, or hump. This hump is more pronounced in Indian Ocean and Atlantic species.

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Colour can vary enormously - Indo-Pacific humpback calves are born dark grey and can become mottled with pink, or almost entirely pink as adults in some populations. Indian Ocean and Atlantic species remain grey.

Distribution: Estuarine, nearshore

Diet: Fish, cuttlefish

IUCN Conservation status:
- Indo-Pacific: Vulnerable
- Indian Ocean: Endangered
- Atlantic: Critically Endangered
- Australian: Vulnerable

There are four recognised species of humpback dolphins that occur in different parts of the world: the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin (Sousa chinensis), the Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (S. plumbea), the Atlantic humpback dolphin (S. teuszii) and the Australian humpback dolphin (S. sahulensis).

Individual humpback dolphins can be recognised by the nicks and scars on their dorsal fins, through a process called photo-identification. These are Indo-Pacific humpbacks from Malaysian Borneo. (Photos courtesy of Sarawak Dolphin Project).

In some populations of Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins, calves are born grey, but can become increasingly mottled until they are almost fully pink as adults.

Photo courtesy of Sarawak Dolphin Project

Australian humpback dolphins have a distinct diagonal dorsal ‘cape’ visible in this photo from northern Queensland.

Photo courtesy of Guido Parra.

Indian Ocean and Atlantic humpback dolphins are all grey and do not have the pink mottling of Indo-Pacific humpbacks. They also have a more pronounced hump under their dorsal fin.

Indian Ocean humpback dolphin in Oman: Photo courtesy of Graeme Hornby

Male Atlantic and Indian Ocean humpback dolphins can have extremely pronounced humps under their dorsal fins, like this individual from Gabon.

Photo Gianna Minton, WWF Gabon


Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin
Adult length: 2.7m (male)
Adult weight: up to 240kg (male)
Newborn: 100cm / 14kg

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