

# the mastery of swimming with dolphins

A sense of transformation continues to be a common experience for those who swim with dolphins.

We asked **Amlas McLeod** of *Wildquest* to share some of the magic of the experience.

In a survey asking 20 000 people, 'What do you want to do before you die', the top vote went to swimming with dolphins. But why are humans so entranced by these creatures? And why has it always been this way, across the world and across the ages? Humans and dolphins are kindred spirits – the only two species on earth to have evolved with highly intelligent brains: man on the land and cetacea, dolphins, in the sea. Both breathe air. Dolphins and man have brains of approximately the same relative size and complexity. But dolphins were perfected millions of years before we left footprints on the beach. Their basic anatomy has not changed in 5 million years.

Much of the dolphin brain is concerned with intra-species communication, which some experts believe to be even more highly evolved than human language. Dance seems to be at the heart of dolphin communication, with the body language of posture, gesture and touch playing a large part. Most dolphin trainers feel that dolphins are way more sophisticated than mere circus animals. They display extraordinary and spiritual qualities, yet there is so much about them that is difficult to explain without further research. Humans have been trying to piece the puzzle together for centuries.

Dolphins have been the subjects of numerous ancient myths. The Greeks believed that dolphins were once men, and saw them as cheerful, intelligent and loving. Symbolically, dolphins represented redemption. The myth is mirrored by science – dolphins were once land mammals that long ago chose to return to the sea and X-rays of dolphins' flippers show vestigial hand bones.

Many stories project the highest human values and qualities onto dolphins. For the Native American Indian, the dolphin symbolizes salvation. The Australian Aboriginals have woven dolphins into their 'dreamtimes', as the merciful and friendly side of the deep and dangerous ocean. According to legend, dolphins taught the Dogon tribe of Africa the exact positions of the stars in the night sky. In the Yogic tradition, dolphins are seen as the messengers of the Akashic records – envoys of the information bank of 'all that is'.

History is littered with documented tales of dolphins leading ships through treacherous waters. Incidents of man being





“ I felt peaceful, blissful and in harmony. Was I changed? Yes I was changed ”

rescued by riding on a dolphin's back and of attracting dolphins by music are also well known. The latest research also proves their healing powers.

Scientists writing recently in the *British Medical Journal* (November 26 2005 issue) say that swimming with dolphins significantly alleviates depression. For people who work with dolphins this finding comes as no surprise. Seeing a dolphin leap into the air makes people of all ages squeal with delight.

Dolphins actually defy the laws of physics – they shouldn't be able to leap as high or to swim as fast. Practically every person who has been in the water with them, says the experience changed their life. A local fisherman in Bimini explained why, just as well as any scientific data can: 'When a dolphin breaks the surface of the ocean to breathe I have the feeling that all is right with the world.'

Until science can codify and quantify the qualities of love, delight and innocence, perhaps the best way to explain why humans and dolphins resonate so harmoniously, is the testimony of those who have met them.

When people were asked to describe their experiences with the dolphins – whether their expectations were met, and how the experience changed their lives – this is what they had to say:

• 'Swimming with dolphins was simply something I knew I had to do. The impulse was unexplainable, coming not from the linear part of my brain but from whatever it is that beats in my heart, animates my mind and spirit and gives an unequivocal "yes" to life. The experience is beyond the scope of words. I find myself floating in unfamiliar headgear in the warm blue of the Bahamas; it is my first day out. A tell-tale clicking, and I am magically circled by three slow moving dolphins. What must be a very short time is an infinitely exploding moment of relief, peace, quiet joy. It is home. It is meant to be. I am meant to be. Thank you dolphins, for introducing me to the deepest sense of gratitude, security and love I have ever known.'

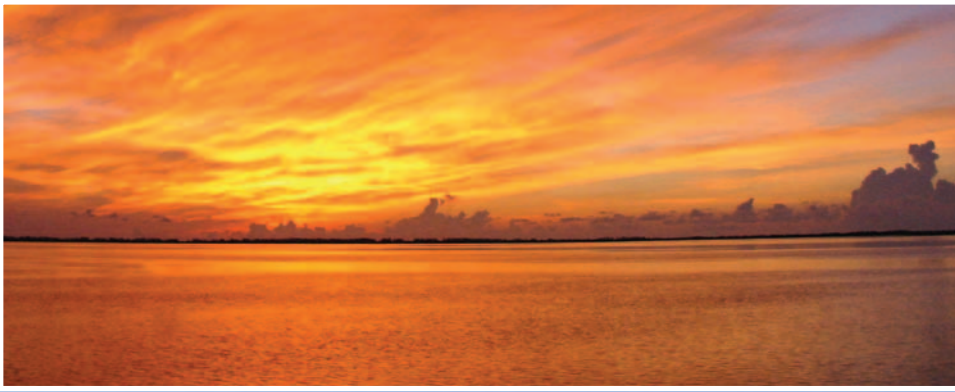
• 'When I connect with wild dolphins in the middle of the Ocean it makes me feel very special and that's what I didn't feel when I was a child. I feel very privileged to have been in close contact with them, I could immediately feel their ability to understand my condition, read my heart and if I am ready, even repair it.'

• 'Ever since I can remember, I was intrigued by dolphins; their beauty and playfulness. I would dream about them at night, swimming alongside them as one of their pod members. I only knew of the captive kind that lived at Seaworld, and every time I saw them, I would cry. Wildquest was one of the only places that offered the experience of connecting with them in the wild. My experience was more than I ever expected. At first, I feared that the dolphins wouldn't come and play, but I knew deep in my heart that they would give me what I always dreamt of: connection, beauty, love, wisdom.'

• 'Being in their presence changed my life as I peered into the eyes of an older dolphin when he swam within arm's length. I never felt so calm, at peace and powerful, yet excited. My life changed in those six days underwater with these amazing beings of the sea. They showed me how to play, be in love, respect life and to be present.'



Photographs: Atmo



*The vibrational pattern of the sound waves hitting my heart chakra moved through my body in a way I cannot describe in words. As I got hit with sonar I felt transported back to the dimension that I am most familiar. Since my first dolphin experience, I feel much more sensitive and intuitive. The dolphins taught me about my purpose and opened me to realms I never knew existed. I have dreams of dolphins and during my waking hours often "hear" the clicking sounds of the dolphins*



• *'I came when the dolphins called me, when the tendrils of fate, dreams and synchronicity merged to find me, the dolphins, and Wildquest together. It was a gift to myself and a continuation of small acts of courage to take the trip alone, my first vacation just for myself. There is an*



*overwhelming sense of wonder and joy to be in the presence of dolphins...free dolphins who are with you because they are curious and have chosen to be with you. No matter how long the encounter lasts, face to face with a dolphin there is a place of no time, ordinary life vanishes, and the heart opens and expands with tenderness and love. It is you, the dolphin, and infinite*



*possibilities captured in a moment. Later, on the surface and in your dreams, you will relive the moment, feel the joy and the sorrow of parting and have a deep longing for reunion. You will never be the same, and you will not wish to be.'*

• *'Metaphorically, to be with the dolphins for me was about diving deep on the outside in order to go inside. They touch the playful, innocent part of me that easily and simply knows how to be. No filtering, no questioning of whether I'm getting it right. I'm being as innocent as I was when I was a little kid, and I'm aware of it. We resonate, we meet and we are being together.'*

• *'To be with these divine creatures, to feel welcomed in their environment is more than I ever imagined I would experience in this life. It has to be that the healing power of wild dolphins is their silence. I see now that my inner journey is what brought me to the Dolphins. They already are where I long to be.'*

• *'I didn't know that swimming with wild dolphins in the open water would be the most joyous, exhilarating and the most personal journey I have ever taken.'*

• *'As a young child I innately knew I would swim in the wild with dolphins. I had no notion of what it would be like other than it would happen when the time was right. My first experience was in Hawaii swimming with spinner dolphins.'*

*alternately in my ears. I have a strong connection to dolphin energy with me at all times.'*

• *'The reality, upon encountering dolphins, was that I was totally transfixed by them – it felt as if for those moments, my conscious mind was totally*

*emptied. I was moved, to the point of tears, and then filled with enormous joy!*

*'After coming back to my daily life, the feeling of an inner smile continues to resonate, and a recognition that even on dry land, I am still swimming in an ocean of boundless love.'*

Dolphins are supremely intelligent, highly social, endlessly flirtatious and not above a fight. Dolphins are the creatures we might have been had we lived in the sea. Yet, the question remains of whether they have already made an evolutionary step that humans haven't yet, but we yearn to follow.

Dolphins are conscious breathers – they have to be awake to remember to breathe. When anaesthetized they die. In other words, dolphins must 'remain in the present' and it is this state, of total conscious awareness that humans find so magical and magnetic. We, on the other hand, are unconscious breathers – we can live a lifetime and never be in the present moment where life actually happens!

Perhaps we humans know, deep within, that we can match the dolphin's state of open-hearted, conscious awareness, and it is our ability to make that next evolutionary step that tugs at our heart strings just as playfully as the flip of a dolphin's tail.

Whatever it is that draws us to them, it is obviously something mysterious, something of beauty that makes this world a better place to live in. ks



### more information

• Amlas McLeod runs the Human-Dolphin Connection programme with Wildquest in the Bahamas. The Atlantic Spotted Dolphins and the Bottlenose Dolphins live in this area. For more information see [www.wildquest.com](http://www.wildquest.com) Many thanks to all those who shared their experiences in this article.