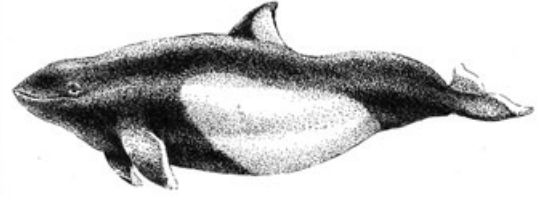




## Dall's Porpoise

*Phocoenoides dalli*, commonly known as the **Dall's porpoise**, is most easily recognized by its unique black and white markings similar to those of a killer whale/orca. It was named by the American naturalist William Healey Dall who was the first to collect a specimen. The Dall's porpoise is capable of swimming in excess of 30 knots and is often seen riding along side the bows of boats.

**General description:** The Dall's porpoise is black with white markings. Most commonly the animal will be mostly black with large white sections on the sides, belly, on the edges of the flukes, and around the dorsal fin, though there are exceptions to this pattern. The Dall's porpoise is born at an approximate size of 3ft. The average size of an adult is 6.4 ft and weighs approximately 300 lbs. The body is stocky and more powerful than other members of phocoenidae (porpoises). The head is small and lacks a distinct beak. The flippers are small, pointed, and located near the head. The dorsal fin is triangular in shape with a hooked tip. The mouth of the Dall's porpoise is small and has a slight underbite.



**Food habits:** Dall's porpoises eat a wide variety of prey species. In some areas they eat squid, but in other areas they may feed on small schooling fishes such as capelin, lantern fish (Myctophids), and herring. They generally forage at night.

**Life history:** Female Dall's porpoises reach sexual maturity at between 3 and 6 years of age and males around 5 to 8 years, though there is little known about their mating habits. After a 12 month gestation period, a single calf is born, usually during mid-summer. Calves and their mothers live separate from main porpoise herds for a period of time. Lactation lasts 2-4 months and Dall's porpoise usually have calves every 3 years. The average life span is 16-17 years.

**Habitat and seasonal movements:** Dall's porpoises live solely in the North Pacific Ocean. They range from Japan to southern California and up to Alaska and the Bering Sea. Throughout most of the eastern North Pacific they are present during all months of the year, although there may be seasonal onshore-offshore movements along the west coast of the continental United States, and winter movements of populations out of Prince William Sound and areas in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea.

**Behavior:** These are perhaps the fastest of the small cetaceans. They are easily recognizable from a distance by the "rooster tail" splash that they make as they surface. This "rooster tail" splash creates a hollow cone, which allows the porpoise to breathe while still under the surface of the water. They generally travel in groups of 10-20, but at times their numbers can reach ten times that. They have an affinity for boats and will often come to ride along side them.

**Population size:** Estimates of total population size for the whole Northern Pacific in 1983 ranged from 790,000 to 2,300,000 animals. There are an estimated 83,400 Dall's porpoise in the Alaskan stock, though due to difficulties in gathering reliable population counts and lack of direct effort, these are not exact numbers.

**Predators, hunting, and other mortality:** Killer whales and sharks are the natural predators of the Dall's porpoise; though because of their large body size, speed and agility, it is believed they generally escape predation. There is no Dall's porpoise fishery in the United States, but it is estimated that about 30 animals per year are killed as a result of being caught in fishing nets in Alaska. There is still an active Dall's porpoise fishery in Japan. Estimates suggested 40,367 Dall's porpoises were killed in 1989 from the Japanese hand-harpoon fishery alone. In recent years these numbers have declined because of the Japanese government's effort to regulate the hand-harpooning of these animals. In 1992 11,403 were killed. This species is often killed accidentally in the Japanese seas and off of North America by drift nets set for salmon. Although the numbers of Dall's porpoise taken have been drastically reduced in the past decade, at one point it is estimated that over 20,000 were caught in Japan and over 4,000 in the US in a single year. The reduction in incidental catch is a result of better fishing equipment and practices.

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Printed in 2008