

Orca

The World's Largest Dolphin
- by Ingrid N. Visser -

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An orca approaching Ingrid's boat
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When people think of dolphins, they often picture the bottlenose dolphin or the common dolphin. But there are many other kinds of dolphins. One of these is the orca – the world's largest dolphin.

Orca are found in all the oceans of the world, but not all orca are the same. They live in extended family groups, and each group has its own **culture**. This includes the way its members hunt, what they feed on, where they travel, their **dialect**, and the way they live together. Adult orca teach these skills to their young.

Killer whales

Orca are known by a number of other names. Some people call them killer whales – but not because they think orca are whales. It's because orca are the “killer of whales”. They hunt blue whales (the largest whales in the world) and other kinds of whales as well. In the wild, orca have never been known to harm people.

In te reo Māori, orca are known as maki or kākahi. The scientific name for orca is *Orcinus orca* (pronounced *Or-sigh-nus or-ka*).

I've been researching orca around New Zealand for many years. I take photographs of every orca I see so that I can build up a **catalogue** of individuals. Each orca looks different. I record when and where I see each one. I also make a note of any other orca that are with it. This helps me to monitor their movements. I've discovered that there are fewer than two hundred orca living around our coastline. Some of them stay around the North Island, some around the South Island, and others move around the whole country.



Rudie (NZ24)



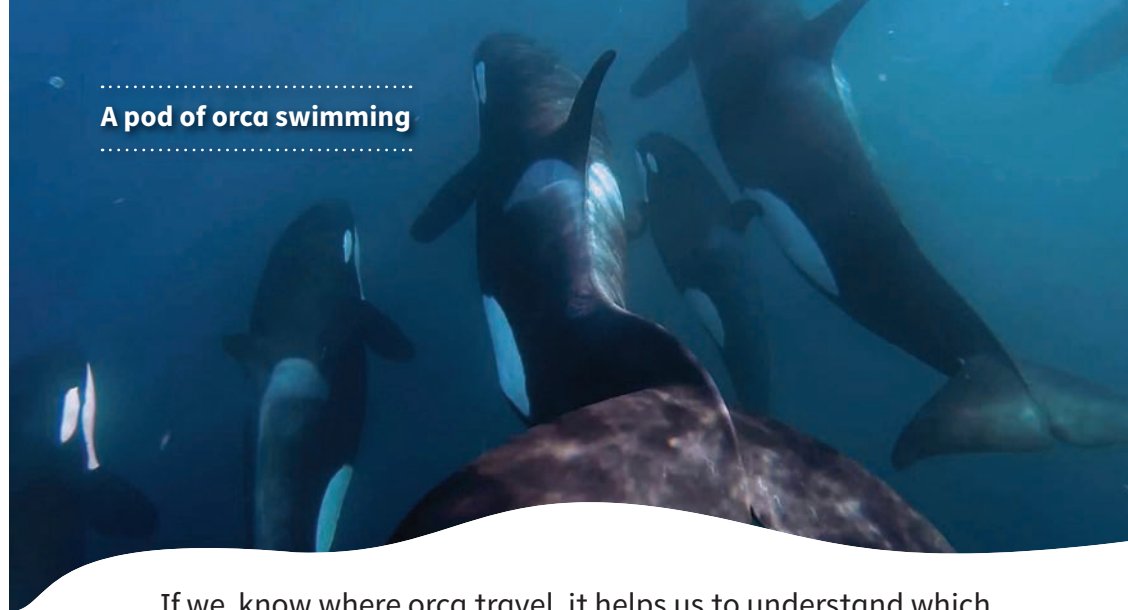
Astrid (NZ32)



Pickle (NZ133)



A pod of orca swimming



If we know where orca travel, it helps us to understand which parts of our coastline are important to them and where we need to protect their **habitat**.

I've learnt that New Zealand orca use our harbours to hunt, sleep, play, and give birth to their young. For orca to survive, these harbours need to be clean and as natural as possible.

Unfortunately, each year many orca are hit and badly injured by boats. It's important that boat owners drive responsibly around them. This means not going too fast and not getting too close. Orca need to be given space to live their lives.

Ben (NZ101)





Ingrid with a stranded orca

Around the world, orca feed on a variety of **prey**. In Antarctic waters, they hunt for penguins, seals, and fish. Around New Zealand, our orca eat at least seven species of shark and four species of ray. When hunting sharks, orca have to be very careful that the sharks don't bite them! Sometimes an orca will use its tail to hit the shark to stun it and slow it down.

When hunting rays, orca can come in very close to the shore. Sometimes they become stuck on the beach. If this happens, they often need help to get back into the water. I've helped to rescue many orca that were **stranded**. On occasions, I've heard them calling for their families. Some orca that have been rescued have been spotted alive and well years later. I feel good knowing I was able to help save them.

Orca watching

If you are on the coast, look out for orca. Now and then, they come in very near to shore. If you are on a boat, remind the driver not to get closer than 50 metres to an orca and not to go fast. The boat might run over the orca and hurt it. If you see a stranded orca or spot one around the coast, call 0800 SEE ORCA (0800 733 6722).



Glossary

catalogue: a list of items arranged in a certain order

culture: the ideas, customs, and behaviour of a particular group or society (including animals)

dialect: a variety of a language that is used by a particular group

habitat: the natural home or environment of an animal or a plant

prey: an animal that is hunted and killed by another animal for food

stranded: stuck on the shore

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