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FinBook

An identification catalogue for dolphins observed in the Swan Canning Riverpark



ELEVENTH EDITION – 2026

RIVER GUARDIANS

DOLPHIN WATCH

Murdoch University | Harry Butler Institute

ECU EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**

SWAN CANNING RIVERPARK

Foreword



It is always a great pleasure, as Patron of *Dolphin Watch*, to write the foreword to the latest edition of this remarkable book. The dedication of many volunteers in *Dolphin Watch* has made possible the production of this new edition, working alongside the elite scientists and with the unflagging support of the administration team.

The book continues to be a unique guide, of which we should all be proud. It is at the forefront of our understanding about the animals that are cherished by both Western Australians and visitors to our State. Thanks to the book's content, it is possible to identify individual dolphins and to build a more comprehensive picture of their activities. Most importantly, dolphins are crucial components of a healthy ecosystem as well as having a special place in our hearts.

The activities of dolphins, once cryptic, are now becoming clearer. Such information is essential if we are to ensure our waterways remain a suitable environment for dolphins. It is heartening that the number in the Swan Canning Riverpark, at 27 individual dolphins, is comparable to that when we started our survey. The community currently comprises nine adult females, including six with calves. Five of these calves are one year old or younger, with the most recent calf born just as this edition was going to press in October 2026.



The community also includes four fully mature males and two subadult males that are only about two years from reaching maturity. These younger males have already formed strong bonds with one another, providing a great example of alliance formation starting while males are still juveniles.

The community also includes six juveniles, most of whose sexes are known.

I am sure that, at the outset, no one involved in the fledging *Dolphin Watch* program could have imagined that the project would have such a lasting impact. Neither could we have contemplated that the program would extend beyond the Swan Canning Riverpark to the Peel Harvey Estuary and Roebuck Bay. At the heart of *Dolphin Watch* are our extraordinary volunteers, with some 860 currently involved, with 35,000 reports in the Swan Canning Riverpark alone submitted over the life of the program.

Another source of pride is the *Junior Dolphin Watch* program, which since 2021 has engaged with over 2,400 children of preschool and primary school age. School incursions, along with holiday activities and workshops, are helping to build lifelong connections to the natural world.

I remain convinced that *Dolphin Watch*, complemented by the FinBook, is establishing a legacy for future generations of West Australians and enhances the efforts of all who care about the natural world. Whenever you consult this book, please accept a heartfelt 'thank you' from me and from many others. Long may *Dolphin Watch* thrive with those taking part continuing to use the FinBook!

Professor Lyn Beazley AO FAA FTSE

Opposite: Marnz and Zephyr, born to Dunedoo and Eden in 2017 and 2018, have spent much of their life in each other's company. Now approaching maturity, they exhibit many characteristics associated with male alliances in bottlenose dolphins.

Front cover: Scout at six months old, showing off with a pufferfish. Photo: Delphine Chabanne.

All photographs throughout this edition are by Delphine Chabanne and Sue Harper, unless otherwise credited.



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Opposite: A rewarding moment during a foraging session in the Canning River.

Welcome to the 11th Edition of **Fin**Book

A living record of the dolphins of the Swan Canning Riverpark

FinBook is a photographic identification guide to the dolphins observed in the Swan Canning Riverpark. By recognising individual dolphins from their distinctive dorsal fins, we can follow individuals over time and build a picture of the dolphin community, their families, behaviours and changing lives.

More than a catalogue

Each edition of FinBook is a snapshot in time. As dolphins are born, mature, move through the Riverpark, become mothers, and sadly sometimes disappear, the catalogue changes with them.

What's new in the 11th edition

The 11th edition brings together the latest photographs, individual records and family histories from the Riverpark dolphin community. It also highlights what long-term monitoring has taught us about these dolphins and the waterways they depend on.

How to explore this book

Meet the Riverpark and the people who help monitor it, discover the dolphins and their family histories, learn how to identify individuals, explore their behaviour, and find out how we can all help protect them.



Dolphin Watch

Dolphin Watch is a collaborative citizen science program supporting dolphin research, conservation, and community education. Established in 2009 by the Swan River Trust (now the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, DBCA) in partnership with Murdoch and Curtin universities, the program aims to improve our understanding of the resident Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin community within the Swan Canning Riverpark.

The program has since evolved into a partnership between DBCA's Parks and Wildlife Service, Murdoch University and Edith Cowan University. In 2018, *Dolphin Watch* expanded beyond Perth to monitor resident Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins in the Peel-Harvey Estuary (Mandurah), and Australian snubfin dolphins in Roebuck Bay (Broome) through additional collaborations.

Researchers and DBCA's River Guardians team train volunteers in dolphin monitoring techniques. These citizen scientists contribute valuable information on dolphin sightings, movements and behaviours, helping to support research and conservation efforts. Today, more than 1,500 trained *Dolphin Watchers* and hundreds of active volunteers contribute observations, photographs and videos that provide important insights into dolphin ecology and habitat use across the Swan Canning Riverpark and beyond.

Community members can report dolphin sightings through the free Marine Fauna Sightings smartphone app, available on iOS and Android devices.

By connecting science, management and community participation, *Dolphin Watch* contributes to the long-term conservation of dolphins and the habitats on which they depend.

What *Dolphin Watch* has taught us

For more than 15 years, *Dolphin Watch* volunteers have worked alongside researchers from the Coastal and Estuarine Dolphin Project (CEDP) to improve our understanding of the resident Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins of the Swan Canning Riverpark. Together, citizen science and long-term research have provided valuable insights into the lives of these dolphins and the challenges they face.

A small community in a busy waterway

The Swan Canning Riverpark is home to a small resident community of 27 Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins. Unlike visiting dolphins that occasionally enter the estuary, these individuals use the Riverpark year-round and spend much of their lives within this unique ecosystem. Living within a highly urbanised estuary, they share their habitat with boating, fishing, recreation and waterfront development.

Riverpark dolphins don't stay in one place

Dolphins travel throughout the Riverpark, from the Fremantle Inner Harbour (and occasionally beyond) to the upper reaches of the Swan and Canning rivers. Long-term monitoring has shown that important areas used by dolphins change throughout the year, with seasonal shifts occurring between different parts of the estuary.

Family histories across generations

Long-term monitoring allows researchers to follow individual dolphins throughout their lives. Some calves first documented by researchers and *Dolphin Watch* volunteers are now adults and have calves of their own, providing a rare opportunity to study multiple generations of Riverpark dolphins.

Every observation counts

Since 2009, *Dolphin Watch* volunteers have contributed some 35,000 reports / observations across the Riverpark, helping researchers identify important habitats, monitor changes in dolphin distribution, and support conservation and management decisions. Citizen science and dedicated research surveys together provide a far more complete picture of dolphin ecology than either could alone.



The Swan Canning Riverpark / Riverpark Health

The Swan Canning Riverpark is at the heart of Perth, linking people, nature and culture across a wide network of rivers, wetlands and waterways. The Riverpark includes the waterways of the Derbal Yirragan (Swan River), Djarlgarro Beeliar (Canning River), Mandoon Beeliar (Helena) and Southern rivers, as well as the adjacent public land reserved as regional open space.

The Derbal Yirragan Djarlgarro (Swan Canning river system) extends far beyond the main channels and includes 126,000 km^2 of catchment that drains into these waterways, including the mighty Gogulgar Beeliar (Avon River) and connects with the ocean at Walyalup (Fremantle). For Whadjuk Noongar people, the rivers are living cultural landscapes, connected to Country, creation stories, customary practices and a custodial responsibility that has continued for thousands of years.

The Riverpark supports a remarkable diversity of life, including over 200 species of fish, a resident dolphin community, a wide array of bird species, such as migratory waders, over 6 km^2 of seagrass meadows and important remnant wetlands and foreshore vegetation. It is also one of Perth's most valued public spaces, providing opportunities for walking, cycling, boating, fishing, swimming and relaxation. The waterway is highly valued not only for its environmental importance, but also for the lifestyle, wellbeing and connection to nature it provides.

Care, control and management of the Riverpark is enacted through the *Swan Canning Rivers Management Act* and a River Protection Strategy that defines approaches for coordinated management to protect river system values. Additionally, sanctuary and wildlife refuge areas, including the Swan Estuary Marine Park and the Canning River Regional Park, exist to protect critical habitat, vegetation and wildlife within the river system.

Despite being recognised as one of the healthiest river systems associated with a major city in Australia, its condition is under increasing pressure. Climate change, population growth and pollution are significant challenges. Reduced rainfall and river flows, rising temperatures, nutrient runoff, plastics and other contaminants can affect water quality, wildlife and ecosystem health. Historical loss of wetlands and vegetation has also reduced the natural resilience of the system.

Encouragingly, ongoing restoration and management programs are helping to protect and improve the health of the waterways. Water quality is actively monitored and addressed through catchment management, foreshore habitats are being restored, and significant biodiversity values are protected. The long-term vision for the Riverpark is for a healthy, thriving river system that supports both nature and people, while recognising and strengthening Noongar knowledge, culture and care for Country.



Meet the Riverpark dolphins

The Swan Canning Riverpark is home to 27 resident dolphins, including six dependent calves (as of October 2026). These dolphins form a distinct community because they use the Riverpark year-round and regularly associate with one another.

Although the Riverpark dolphins are considered residents, they are not completely isolated. Some resident dolphins are occasionally observed outside the estuary, while dolphins from the neighbouring coastal communities in Cockburn Sound or Owen Anchorage also visit the Riverpark. These interactions help maintain genetic diversity across the Perth metropolitan population.

Long-term monitoring has revealed family relationships across generations and provided insights into the movements, social relationships and health of Riverpark dolphins. Researchers have documented family lineages from grandmother to mother to calf, such as Moon's lineage, as well as long-term associations between adult males, including Bottomslice and Blackwall, providing evidence of stable male alliances within the Riverpark community.

Monitoring has also documented significant challenges facing these dolphins. More than 20 fishing gear entanglement incidents have been reported since 2011, including 16 confirmed cases, with some dolphins suffering serious injuries or death. Disease outbreaks have also affected the community, with Cetacean Morbillivirus (CeMV) responsible for the loss of six and five resident dolphins during the 2009 and 2019 outbreaks, respectively.

Riverpark dolphins by the numbers

Over more than 15 years of monitoring, the resident community has ranged in size from 21 to 35 dolphins. Researchers have recorded up to 12 visitors from neighbouring coastal communities in a single year and documented 51 calves born into the resident community since 2011, including as many as five calves born in a single year. Despite these births, the community has remained small due to mortality from disease, natural causes, and other threats faced by dolphins living in an urban estuary. Long-term monitoring continues to provide valuable information on births, deaths, movements and family relationships among Riverpark dolphins.

A lifetime of stories

Following dolphins through time

A dolphin's story does not begin and end with a single sighting. By recognising individual dolphins from their distinctive dorsal fins, *Dolphin Watch* can follow animals over many years. A photograph taken today can be linked to observations made years earlier, allowing researchers to build a picture of an individual's life, from birth and independence to adulthood, motherhood, social relationships, injuries and, eventually, disappearance from the community. Over time, these individual records become something much bigger: a history of the dolphin community itself.

One family, four generations

Some of the most remarkable stories emerge when researchers can follow dolphins across multiple generations.

The maternal lineage of Moon can be traced back to her mother, Socket, who was a resident of the Swan Canning Riverpark and died in 2009. Moon was first documented as a calf alongside Socket during the early 2000s and later became one of the best-known adult females in the resident community.

Moon's second calf, Djinda, was born in 2014 and has been monitored since birth through regular surveys of the resident community. In 2023, Djinda became a mother for the first time. Her first calf, Walken, sadly died when only a few months old.

Djinda later gave birth to Meekany in February 2025. During Meekany's first few months of life, researchers were able to observe the calf alongside both its mother and grandmother, Moon. This provided a rare opportunity to document a four-generation maternal lineage within the Swan Canning Riverpark before Moon passed away in May 2025.

Stories like these are only possible because individual dolphins can be recognised and followed through time.

Generations of Riverpark dolphins



Legend: †Deceased *Entanglement ◊CeMV ?Disappeared, fate unknown



Akuna
F: Early 2000's

- **Nala**†◊ — F: 2014–2019
- **Super**† — 2018–2022
- **Bilya**†* — M: 2021
- **Kaya** — F: Jun 2022
- **Matata** — Apr 2026



Dunedoo
F: Mid 2000's

- **Karda**† — 2016
- **Marnz** — M: Nov 2017
- **Kep**† — 2022
- **Hope**†* — 2023–2025
- **Wyuna** — Mar 2026



Eden
F: Early 2000's

- **Garden**? — M: 2010–2018
- **Heaven**† — 2014–2016
- **Clover**† — 2016–2017
- **Zephyr** — M: Dec 2018
- **Apple**† — 2022–2024
- **Bloom**† — 2025
- **Unnamed calf** — Oct 2026



Panuni
F: ~2005

- **Cruze**? — 2015–2024
- **Valor**† — 2019
- **Dambart**†* — F: 2022
- **Honour** — F: Nov 2025



Claw
F: Mid 2000's

- **Bobby** — F: Apr 2019
- **Smiley** — Apr 2023

Using **Fin**Book

How we identify Riverpark dolphins

Each dolphin can be identified by the unique shape and markings of its dorsal fin. Nicks, notches, and scars, particularly along the leading and trailing edges of the fin, allow researchers and trained volunteers to recognise individual dolphins over many years.

These markings are acquired throughout a dolphin's life and may result from interactions with other dolphins, shark bites, natural injuries, disease, or encounters with fishing gear. Calves are typically born with smooth, unmarked dorsal fins, often referred to as "clean fins", and gradually develop distinctive features as they grow older.

The catalogue displays a photograph of each dolphin's dorsal fin, together with information such as sex, age class, and year of first identification. Where available, additional information is provided on family relationships, including known calves, as well as notable life-history events such as injuries, entanglements, or other distinguishing features documented through long-term monitoring.



FinBook sections

FinBook is divided into five sections based on age, sex and residency status.

Females with dependent calves

Adult females accompanied by calves that were still dependent on their mothers in 2026. Mother-calf pairs are presented together and listed by calf age, from youngest to oldest.

Adult Females without dependent calves

Adult females without a currently dependent calf. Many of these long-term residents have known reproductive histories documented through more than 15 years of monitoring.

Adult Males

Resident adult males belonging to the Riverpark community. Some individuals have been known through research and monitoring programs dating back to the early 2000s.

Juveniles and subadults

Independent dolphins ranging from younger juveniles to older subadults approaching maturity. While younger juveniles continue to develop their social relationships, older subadults, particularly males, may form consistent social associations.

Visitors

Since 2011, more than 40 dolphins from neighbouring coastal communities have been recorded visiting the Swan Canning Riverpark. These individuals are encountered only occasionally and may associate with resident dolphins during their visits. While we cannot feature every visitor, this section highlights dolphins that were sighted within the Riverpark during 2026.

Dolphins are presented using their most recent photographs from 2026. As dorsal fins can change over time through the acquisition of new marks and scars, the appearance of an individual may differ from photographs shown in previous editions of *FinBook* and from future observations. For the most up-to-date dorsal fin photographs and information, visit the River Guardians website: riverguardians.com

Females with dependent calves (2026)

Listed by calf age (youngest to oldest)



Name **Eden**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2009

Story

Eden is the mother of at least seven known calves. While most are no longer observed within the estuarine resident community, her newest calf was first documented in early October 2026. Several of Eden's calves have disappeared at various ages, ranging from infancy to several years old, while Zephyr remains her only known surviving offspring from previous reproductive records. Eden is most frequently observed in the lower reaches of the Riverpark, including the Fremantle Inner Harbour.

Family

Mother of Garden†, Heaven†, Clover†, Zephyr, Apple†, Bloom† and a calf first documented in October 2026



Calf's name **Unnamed calf**
Born October 2026

Story

Dolphin Watch volunteer Caron Jander first spotted Eden's new calf during an early morning kayaking trip on the Swan River on 11 October 2026. Researchers confirmed Eden as the mother on 17 October 2026. The sighting highlights the valuable contribution that Dolphin Watch volunteers make to the long-term monitoring of the Riverpark's dolphins. As this calf was only recently documented, it had not yet been named at the time of publication.

Females with dependent calves (2026)

Listed by calf age (youngest to oldest)

Name **Akuna**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2009



Story
One of the longest-known females in the Riverpark community, Akuna has produced five known calves since 2014. Kaya remains part of the estuarine resident community, while Nala died during the 2019 Cetacean Morbillivirus outbreak, Bilya was euthanised at just three months of age following severe fishing gear entanglement injuries in 2021, and Super disappeared in 2022 following health concerns.

Family
Mother of Nala†, Super†, Bilya†, Kaya, and Matata

Calf's name **Matata**
Born April 2026

Story
Akuna's youngest and fifth known calf, regularly observed alongside its mother. Matata was named by Shane Davidson.



Females with dependent calves (2026)

Listed by calf age (youngest to oldest)

Name **Dunedoo**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2009



Story
Dunedoo lost her first and third calves, Karda (2016) and Kep (2022), at birth or shortly afterwards. Her second calf, Marnz, remains part of the estuarine resident community. Her fourth calf, Hope, named by staff from Fremantle Ports, was observed entangled in fishing gear around the rostrum, dorsal fin and pectoral fins in 2024 when only eight months old. Despite several attempts to remove the entangling gear, Hope disappeared in February 2025. Dunedoo herself has also been observed entangled in fishing lines on a couple of occasions but was able to shed the line without intervention.

Family
Mother of Karda†, Marnz, Kep†, Hope†, and Wyuna

Calf's name **Wyuna**
Born March 2026

Story
Dunedoo's youngest and fifth known calf, regularly observed alongside its mother. Wyuna, meaning "clear water" in Noongar language, was named by Oyumaa Batsaikhan.



Females with dependent calves (2026)

Listed by calf age (youngest to oldest)

Name **Panuni**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2011



Story

Panuni is most frequently observed in the lower reaches of the Riverpark, including the Fremantle Inner Harbour. Her first calf, Cruze, was born in 2014 and was last observed in 2024. No calves were documented for Panuni between Cruze's birth and 2019, when she lost Valor within the first month after birth. In October 2022, Panuni lost her six-month-old calf, Dambart, named by *Dolphin Watch* volunteer Melanie after the Noongar word for 'three'.

Family

Mother of Cruze[?], Valor[†], Dambart[†], and Honour

Calf's name **Honour**
Sex Female
Born November 2025



Story

Panuni's youngest and fourth known calf, regularly observed alongside its mother. Honour was named by Amy Lockley, who was among the first to observe the calf during research surveys and had recently completed her Honours degree.

Females with dependent calves (2026)

Listed by calf age (youngest to oldest)

Name **Daniele**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2009



Story

Daniele is recognised by the notch on the leading edge of her dorsal fin, although it has recently become less distinctive following an unknown change. She is one of the most prolific known mothers among the living female dolphins of the estuarine resident community, having produced six known calves. Her first two calves, Voyager (2013) and Journey (2014), were lost shortly after birth. Echo (2015) died during the 2019 Cetacean Morbillivirus outbreak, and Slinky (2019) disappeared in 2022. Blue (2022) remains part of the estuarine resident community.

Family

Daughter of Highnitch; Mother of Voyager†, Journey†, Echo†, Slinky†, Blue and Scout

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Calf's name **Scout**
Sex Male
Born August 2025



Story

Daniele's youngest and sixth known calf. Scout can already be recognised by the distinctive notch midway along the trailing edge of his dorsal fin. Regularly observed alongside his mother, Scout was seen playing with a pufferfish at only six months of age, providing researchers with a memorable glimpse into the curiosity and playfulness often displayed by young dolphins.

Females with dependent calves (2026)

Listed by calf age (youngest to oldest)

Name **Djinda**
Sex Female
Age Adult
Born May 2014



Story

Djinda was the first female dolphin in the estuarine resident community to become a mother after being known since birth. Born to Moon, Djinda was named by Rhonda Harman, and her name means "star" in Noongar. Her first calf, Walken, born in April 2023 and named after the Noongar word for rainbow, died in June 2023 at just a few months of age from a severe lungworm infestation that led to pneumonia. Djinda has since given birth to a second calf, Meekany, which is featured below.

Family

Daughter of Moon; Mother of Walken† and Meekany

Calf's name **Meekany**
Sex Female
Born February 2025



Story

Regularly observed alongside its mother, Meekany spent the first few months of life with both its mother, Djinda, and grandmother, Moon, before Moon's passing in May 2025, providing a rare opportunity to observe three generations of the same family together. The name Meekany, meaning "moonlight" in Noongar, was also suggested by Rhonda Harman.

Adult females

without a known dependent calf (as of October 2026)

Name **Claw**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2011



Story
Claw is missing the tip of her rostrum, although this injury does not appear to affect her ability to forage. The cause of the injury is unknown. She has two known calves, Bobby (2019) and Smiley (2023), both of which have since become independent and continue to be observed within the estuarine resident community.

Family
Mother of Bobby and Smiley

Name **Click**
Sex Female
Age Adult
Born March 2016



Story
Click lost her mother, Tupac, during the 2019 Cetacean Morbillivirus outbreak and survived a shark attack in 2021, which left a distinctive scar on the right side of her body. One of only two female dolphins known since birth within the estuarine resident community, Click gave birth to her first calf, Bindi Bindi, in May 2026. Tragically, Bindi Bindi died four months later from fishing line entanglement. During this period, Click was also observed with a superficial shark bite, highlighting her vulnerability as a young mother. Click was named by Ruby Pyle.

Family
Daughter of Tupac; Mother of Bindi Bindi†

Adult females

without a known dependent calf (as of October 2026)

Name **Hugs**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2011



Story

Hugs knows the Riverpark well. Born in Owen Anchorage to Cuddles, a member of the neighbouring resident community, Hugs first visited the Swan Canning Riverpark with her mother in 2013 and became independent in 2014. Since giving birth to Bubbles in 2021, both have been regularly sighted throughout the year, particularly around Fremantle Ports and the lower reaches of the estuary, and have been considered members of the estuarine resident community since then. Bubbles remains Hugs' only known offspring.

Family

Daughter of Cuddles (Owen Anchorage); Mother of Bubbles

Adult males

Alliance Pair 1

Name **Bottomslice**
Sex Male
Age Adult
First recorded 2001

Story
Known since 2001, Bottomslice is one of the longest-studied males in the Swan Canning River. For many years, he was most often seen with Hii and Arrow. Following their disappearances in 2017 and 2019, Bottomslice formed an especially close bond with Blackwall. Today, the two males are regularly sighted together and frequently travel between the Swan Canning Riverpark and Cockburn Sound, where they are often observed associating with females from neighbouring dolphin communities.



Name **Blackwall**
Sex Male
Age Adult
First recorded 2001

Story
Also known since 2001, Blackwall is the second longest-studied male in the Swan Canning Riverpark. In addition to the few notches along the trailing edge of his dorsal fin, he has a distinctive chunk missing from his peduncle, likely the result of an old shark bite, which can also assist with identification. Since 2018, he has formed a close alliance with Bottomslice, and the pair are now rarely seen apart as they move between the estuary and Cockburn Sound.



Adult males

Alliance Pair 2

Name **Extreme**
Sex Male
Age Adult
First recorded 2009

Story

Extreme is a long-term resident male of the Swan Canning Riverpark. He was previously most often sighted with Print, forming a close alliance until Print died in 2018. In more recent years, Extreme has been regularly observed with Kwinana Lookalike, and the pair are frequent visitors to adjacent coastal waters beyond the estuary.



Name **Kwillena Lookalike**
Sex Male
Age Adult
First recorded 2011

Story

Kwinana Lookalike bears several scars from a shark attack sustained in winter 2014. Although his associations with other males have historically been less consistent than those of some alliance pairs, since 2018 he has most often been sighted alongside Extreme. The pair are regular visitors to waters adjacent to the Swan Canning Riverpark.



Subadults/Juveniles

Name **Marnz**
Sex Male
Age Subadult
Born November 2017

Story
Named after Marnie Giroud, whose passion and dedication helped shape the *Dolphin Watch* project, Marnz is often seen with fellow subadult Zephyr. As they mature, their strong association is already providing an early glimpse into the social bonds that characterise adult male dolphins.

Family
Mother: Dunedoo



Name **Zephyr**
Sex Male
Age Subadult
Born December 2018

Story
Named by Sue Friell, Zephyr is often seen alongside fellow subadult Marnz. The pair spend much of their time together, and as they mature, their strong association already offers an early glimpse into the social bonds that characterise adult male dolphins.

Family
Mother: Eden



Subadults/Juveniles

Name **Bobby**
Sex Female
Age Juvenile
Born April 2019

Story
Named after Robert (Bob) Broadway, Bobby is one of the oldest juveniles currently documented within the Swan Canning Riverpark community.

Family
Mother: Claw



Name **Nganga**
Sex Female
Age Juvenile
Born July 2020

Story
Named by Maddy Erines, Nganga means "sun" in the Noongar language. Born to Moon, she is part of a well-known family line within the estuary and joins her older sister, Djinda, in continuing Moon's legacy.

Family
Mother: Moon



Subadults/Juveniles

Name **Bubbles**
Sex Male
Age Juvenile
Born July 2021

Story
Named by Fremantle Ports staff members, Bubbles can be easily recognised by his curved tail fluke when diving. The deformity is believed to have resulted from a short length of rope becoming wrapped around his tail when he was very young, demonstrating the long-term impacts marine debris can have on dolphins.

Family
Mother: Hugs





Name **Blue**
Sex Male
Age Juvenile
Born February 2022

Story
Named by Hanna Cahill, a Year 5 student from Caversham Primary School, Blue is a young member of the Swan Canning Riverpark community and continues to develop his independence as he progresses through his juvenile years.

Family
Mother: Daniele



Subadults/Juveniles

Name **Kaya**
Sex Female
Age Juvenile
Born June 2022

Story
Named by *Dolphin Watch* volunteer Sue Harper, Kaya means "hello" in the Noongar language. Born to Akuna, she is part of the newest generation of dolphins growing up in the Swan Canning Riverpark.

Family
Mother: Akuna



Name **Smiley**
Sex Unknown
Age Juvenile
Born April 2023

Story
Named by *Dolphin Watch* volunteer Phyllis Elliott, Smiley is currently the youngest juvenile in the Riverpark community. While Smiley is becoming more independent, it can still often be seen with its mother, Claw, or its older sister, Bobby.

Family
Mother: Claw



Non-resident visiting in 2026

Male Alliance from a Neighbouring Community

Name **Montaro**
Sex Male
Age Adult
First recorded 2011
Residency Cockburn Sound

Story

Known since 2011, Montaro was first identified in Cockburn Sound and was historically most often associated with Mime and Ali. While Mime occasionally visited the estuary alongside Montaro during the early years of monitoring, he disappeared in late 2022. Since then, Montaro and Ali have continued to maintain a strong association and have recently resumed visiting the Swan Canning Riverpark.



Name **Ali**
Sex Male
Age Adult
First recorded 2011
Residency Cockburn Sound

Story

Also known since 2011, Ali was often observed alongside Montaro and Mime as part of a closely associated trio. Following Mime's disappearance in late 2022, Ali's bond with Montaro strengthened, and the pair have been sighted together during visits to the Swan Canning Riverpark more recently.



Non-resident visiting in 2026

Females

Name **Infinity**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2011
Residency Owen Anchorage



Story
Infinity first visited the Swan Canning Riverpark in 2020 and returned in 2026. A known breeding female, she was observed being consorted by resident males Bottomslice and Blackwall during her latest visit.

Family
Known offspring: calf born in 2022

Name **Scarlett**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2011
Residency Owen Anchorage



Story
Scarlett has been recorded in the Swan Canning Riverpark on only two occasions, in 2024 and 2026. She has three known calves and was accompanied by her youngest calf during her most recent visit. On both occasions, she was observed in close association with resident males Bottomslice and Blackwall, consistent with consortship behaviour.

Family
Known offsprings: Zig (2008), calf born in 2015, calf born in 2024

Non-resident visiting in 2026

Females

Name **Buster**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 2011
Residency Cockburn Sound



Story
First recorded as a calf and identified as a juvenile in 2013, Buster is the daughter of Ball. She gave birth to her first known calf, Ash, in 2023, who is now likely an independent juvenile. During her first documented visit to the Riverpark in April 2026, Buster was observed being consorted by resident males Bottomslice and Blackwall.

Family
Mother: Ball. Offspring: Ash

Name **Tippy**
Sex Female
Age Adult
First recorded 1993
Residency Cockburn Sound



Story
Tippy is one of the oldest known female dolphins from the Cockburn Sound community. She survived two shark attacks just two weeks apart in 2022, resulting in the loss of the tip of her dorsal fin and at least six distinct bite wounds. At the time, Tippy also had a new calf who she lost. Since then, she has been recorded visiting the Riverpark on at least nine occasions, either foraging alone or with resident males Bottomslice and Blackwall.

Family
Known offsprings: 1994 to 2022 (latest calf deceased)



Visiting female Tippy enjoying a peaceful early morning foraging session near Point Walter.

Beyond the fin

What genetics can tell us

Photographs help us identify dolphins, track family histories and follow individuals throughout their lives. Some questions, however, cannot be answered from photographs alone.

Previous genetic studies showed that the Riverpark dolphins form a distinct resident community while remaining connected to neighbouring coastal dolphins. Observations of dolphins moving between areas and resident males accompanying females into the estuary suggest this connection continues today.

Updated genetic research could help answer questions such as:

- Who fathers Riverpark calves?
- Are resident dolphins becoming more closely related over time?
- How much exchange occurs between neighbouring dolphin communities today?
- How has the community changed over generations?

Every photograph helps us understand **who** a dolphin is. Genetics can help us understand **how they are connected**.

Below: Claw (female; front) being followed by Bottomslice and Blackwall, and Extreme and Kwillena Lookalike (males).

Next page: Claw fully airborne, revealing the missing tip of her lower jaw.





Dolphin behaviour

When observing dolphins, it is important to distinguish between behavioural states and behavioural events. Behavioural states are the main activities dolphins engage in over a period of time and are classified into four categories: travelling, resting, socialising, and foraging. Behavioural events are brief actions that occur within these states, such as vocalisations, sudden movements, breaches, tail slaps, or prey capture. The four behavioural states and commonly observed behavioural events are described on the following pages.



Travelling

Dolphins are moving steadily in a consistent direction, indicating purposeful movement from one location to another. They may travel alone or in groups and often surface in a regular, predictable pattern while maintaining their direction of travel.

While travelling, dolphins may occasionally stop and mill around an area if they encounter prey, allowing them to forage briefly before resuming their journey.



Resting

Dolphins that are resting are not actively foraging, travelling, or socialising. Resting dolphins often form tight groups, with individuals typically less than 2m apart. These groups usually move slowly and may not have a clear direction of movement.

Resting dolphins commonly take several breaths at each surfacing before diving again, often submerging and resurfacing in a coordinated manner. They may remain underwater for several minutes and can surface facing a different direction from where they last submerged.

A behaviour commonly associated with resting is **"snagging"**, during which a dolphin floats motionless at the surface for a few seconds, or even several minutes. During snagging, the fluke and much of the dorsal fin remain submerged while the head and upper back are exposed above the water. The dolphin's body can resemble a floating sausage, which is how the term originated.

Sometimes, dolphins may slowly move their heads from side to side while snagging. This behaviour may help them assess their surroundings using echolocation. Although snagging is commonly observed during resting, it can also occur during other behavioural states.



Socialising

Dolphins are highly social animals and spend much of their time interacting with one another. A socialising group is often closely spaced, with individuals swimming near each other and engaging in frequent body contact.

Common social behaviours include rubbing against one another, touching bellies, stroking each other with their pectoral fins, and gently nudging one another with their rostra (beaks). During these interactions, the belly may appear pink due to increased blood flow near the skin's surface.

You may also observe chasing, leaps, porpoising, tail slaps, or bursts of fast swimming during social interactions. However, these behaviours can also occur during foraging, so it is important to observe the group for a period of time before determining its predominant behavioural state. Calves are often seen socialising and playing with one another while their mothers forage nearby.

Not all social interactions are friendly. Some interactions, particularly among males, can be aggressive or antagonistic. The rake marks visible on many dolphins are caused by the teeth of other dolphins during these encounters.



Foraging and feeding

Dolphins actively searching for prey such as fish, squid, and octopus are said to be foraging. When dolphins are catching, processing, and eating prey, they are said to be feeding. Foraging is one of the most commonly observed activities in the Riverpark.

Most prey is consumed underwater. Foraging dolphins are often spread apart (typically more than 10m from one another) and frequently change direction as they search for prey. They may surface for a few breaths, dive for several minutes, and then resurface again. This behaviour is known as mill foraging.

Sometimes dolphins appear eager to return underwater and may surface for only a single quick breath. They may do this by leaping, porpoising, or rapidly surfacing without fully clearing the water.

Although prey is generally consumed underwater, dolphins cannot chew their food. As a result, larger prey items may sometimes be tossed at the surface or dragged along the bottom to break them into smaller pieces before being eaten.

While searching for prey, dolphins may display a range of specialised foraging behaviours, including:

- Fast swimming and 'rooster tailing', where streams of water trail from the dorsal fin. This can develop into a hydroplane, where much of the dolphin's body becomes visible above the surface.
- Bottom-grubbing, where dolphins probe mud, sand, seagrass, or seaweed with their rostrum in search of prey. Dolphins often emerge with mud covering their rostrum, head and sometimes even the dorsal fin.

- Belly-up fish chases, during which dolphins swim upside down while pursuing fish. Their eyesight and echolocation work best in a slightly downward direction, making it easier to track fish this way.
- Herding fish against a structure, such as walls, rock revetments or breakwater, making prey easier to capture.

Dolphins frequently forage while travelling and are often observed searching for prey along riverbanks, marinas, moorings and other structures. They may alternate between travelling and short bouts of mill foraging before continuing on their way.

Below: Daniele tossing a cobbler fish before swallowing it.



Commonly observed behavioural events

Fast swim



Dolphins swimming at faster than normal cruising speeds. Dolphins may swim fast when chasing fish (foraging) or chasing each other (socialising). You may see a spray of water come off the dolphin

Leap



The entire body of a dolphin is out of the water. Leaps may occur when dolphins are foraging (i.e.: a quick breath so that they can get back underwater).

Rooster tail



A fast swim along the surface in which a sheet of water trails off the dorsal fin. Typically observed in the shallows when dolphins are foraging.

Dolphins chasing fish



To record dolphins chasing fish, you must observe the fish being pursued. Dolphins regularly chase fish along the edge of the rivers and other structures and often the fish can be seen jumping out of the water. When snacking, a dolphin swims belly-up near the surface chasing after small fish.

Dolphin with fish



Dolphins observed with fish (including cephalopods like squid and octopus) in their rostrum. Sometimes dolphins toss fish up in the air or repeatedly on the surface to immobilise or break their prey into smaller pieces. If you are able to confirm which species the dolphins are chasing, please note this.

Snagging



Dolphins hanging motionless at the surface with their flukes beneath the water and the front half of their body at the surface. They look like sausages when doing this, hence the term 'snagging'. Dolphins may turn their head from side to side to scan the water. Snagging most often occurs during resting bouts but may occur during pauses in other activities.

Commonly observed behavioural events

Body-to-body contact



Obvious social interaction between dolphins usually involves body-to-body contact. You will often see splashes, fast swims or leaps by dolphins interacting with each other and their bellies flushed pink with excitement. Socialising often occurs in tightly-spaced groups.

Baby position



Calves travelling just behind and to one side of their mother. When a calf surfaces in baby position (BP), its head surfaces near the mother's midsection. Travelling in BP provides a small hydrodynamic benefit for the calf and also easy access to the mammary slits located in the mother's tail region for feeding. Young calves spend a lot of time in BP. As they grow older, they gradually spend less and less time in BP and venture further away from their mother until eventually they are fully weaned. The best way to confirm BP is to see if the calf is substantially smaller than the mother and whether the calf maintains BP for several surfacings.

Male alliance

In the Swan Canning Riverpark, male dolphins have been seen forming strong associations with one or two other males. These pair or trio bonds are known as alliances and can be observed travelling, socialising and moving synchronously side by side.

These enduring social bonds are thought to improve hunting efficiency and mating success, and may persist for decades. Among the resident dolphins, the four adult males currently form two alliance pairs: Bottomslice and Blackwall, and Extreme and Kwillena Lookalike. Among the youngest residents, Marnz and Zephyr have shown signs of developing a similar bond, frequently being observed together since their juvenile years.

All four adult males have also been observed in adjacent waters. Bottomslice and Blackwall have occasionally been seen herding non-resident females within the estuary and, during consortships, Blackwall has been observed performing a distinctive "rooster strut" display, in which he bobs his head above the water while moving alongside a female.

Below: Blackwall performing a "rooster strut" display during consortship with Buster, a female from Cockburn Sound.



Challenges facing Riverpark dolphins

Human-related threats

Fishing Gear Entanglement

Discarded fishing line and other gear can become wrapped around dolphins, causing injury, infection, restricted movement and, in severe cases, death.

Several Riverpark dolphins have been affected by entanglements over the years. Some were able to survive, while others, including Highnitch, Aurora, Hope, Bilya and Bindi Bindi, were lost.

Vessel Traffic

Dolphins share the Riverpark with recreational vessels, ferries and commercial shipping. While no resident dolphins are known to have suffered injuries from vessel strikes, vessel traffic can disrupt feeding, socialising and resting behaviours, which can affect dolphin health and wellbeing over time.

Habitat Health

Riverpark dolphins depend on a healthy estuary and abundant fish populations. Changes to water quality, habitat condition and prey availability can affect the long-term health of the community.



Disease

Cetacean Morbillivirus (CeMV)

CeMV is a naturally occurring viral disease affecting dolphins, porpoises and whales worldwide. It is one of the most significant natural causes of illness and death in cetaceans. The Riverpark community experienced major outbreaks in 2009 and 2019, resulting in the loss of six and five resident dolphins, respectively. Because the community is small, disease outbreaks can have long-lasting impacts on population recovery.

Freshwater Skin Disease

Periods of unusually low salinity following heavy rainfall can cause severe skin disease in dolphins. A freshwater skin disease event contributed to dolphin deaths in the Riverpark in 2009.

Emerging Diseases

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5 bird flu) has caused mortality in birds and marine mammals elsewhere in the world. While it has not been detected in Riverpark dolphins, continued monitoring is important for early detection of emerging health threats.

Photo: Simon Allen.



Be Dolphin Wise

It's easy to help care for dolphins in the Riverpark by following these simple rules:



Enjoy dolphins from a distance – in Western Australia, the law states that:

- A person in the water must maintain a separation distance of at least 50m from a dolphin.
- A person driving or in charge of a vessel (including kayaks and sailboards) must not allow the vessel to get closer than 100m to a dolphin.
- Drones must maintain a 60m separation distance.

Offences for disturbing a cetacean can carry a maximum fine of $500,000.

The separation distances ensure that dolphins can live as wild animals, free from harassment and disturbance from people, ensuring they continue to enjoy our coastal waters for future generations to observe from a safe distance.

If a dolphin approaches you in the water (including on a paddle board or other floating device), you must slowly move away from the dolphin as soon as reasonably possible to the required separation distance.



Go slow for those below – dolphins often form resting groups in the middle reaches of the Riverpark, so keep an eye out for dolphins, and slow down if you spot any.



Let dolphins feed themselves – it is illegal to feed dolphins and leaves them vulnerable to entanglement, boat strikes and disease.



Support a clean marine environment – take your rubbish home – when fishing on the rivers please fish responsibly. Dolphins, particularly calves, can become entangled in fishing line. Make sure you dispose of unwanted fishing line in a rubbish bin, use a biodegradable fishing line and help sustain fish stocks by taking only what you need.

Wildcare
HELPLINE
9474 9055

If you see dolphins in distress, call the Wildcare Helpline on **(08) 9474 9055**. The helpline provides round-the-clock assistance for anyone who finds sick or injured native wildlife.

Be RiverWise

If we want to continue to see dolphins in the Riverpark, we must protect its ecological health so that these food resources remain available and abundant.

The Swan and Canning rivers are an important habitat for bottlenose dolphins. The Riverpark serves as a nursery to raise their calves and as a meeting place to socialise and feed. Good quality habitat in the river system will continue to support the growth, survival and reproduction of these dolphins.

There are abundant fish resources in the Riverpark with a large number of fish species and a multitude of invertebrates, including crabs, prawns and molluscs.

If we want to continue to see dolphins in the Riverpark we must protect its ecological health so that these food resources remain available and abundant.

Nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen can threaten Riverpark health by promoting algal blooms, deoxygenation and fish kills. We need to halve the amount of nutrients entering the Swan Canning river system to protect water quality and ecological health.

Everyone has a role to play in reducing nutrients and protecting dolphin habitat. You can do this by:

- only applying fertiliser when it's needed in spring or early autumn – follow application rate instructions,
- don't over-apply fertilisers and never overwater,
- growing local native plants – they need less water and fertiliser, and attract native birds, lizards, and insects,
- composting your leaves and grass clippings so they don't wash into drains and add nutrients to our rivers and wetlands,
- keeping garden weeds away from drains – they may end up in rivers and wetlands and displace foreshore vegetation, and
- keeping harmful chemicals away from drains.

Check out riverguardians.com for more helpful tips and information.

Glossary

Calf	A dolphin still dependent on its mother, usually up to three years old, but some might become independent at a younger or older age (~ five years old).
Juvenile	A young, immature dolphin, usually about four to 10 years old.
Subadult	A dolphin that is not quite adult-size but larger than a juvenile, also not mature yet.
Adult	A mature, fully grown dolphin.
Dorsal fin	The fin on a dolphin's back (its dorsal surface), provides stability while swimming.
Leading edge (of dorsal fin)	The front edge of the fin (versus trailing edge).
Pectoral fin	Fins on dolphin's side, provide directional control and can also be used for touching when socialising.
Peduncle	An anatomical term for the tail stock of a dolphin, the large muscle system that propels the dolphin through water.
Tail fluke	Used for propulsion.
Blowhole	The hole at the top of a dolphin's head through which the animal breathes air.



Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SWAN CANNING RIVERPARK

RIVER GUARDIANS

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