



# Animal Observation Project

## Questions and Activities:

- Choose one dolphin at Marineland's Dolphin Conservation Center on which to do a physical and behavioral observation. You may pick any animal you'd like, but you must stick with that individual, so be sure you've identified a distinguishing characteristic about it that will help you keep it in view, even if it lives with a group of other animals that look just like it.

### PHYSICAL OBSERVATION

- Draw your animal in the space below:

- Conclusions:
  - What distinguishing characteristic did you use to identify this animal?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - What physical adaptations do you see on your animal that help it to survive in its environment? (Body shape? Coloration?)



## Teacher Copy

- How would behavioral observations such as the one you just completed help a dolphin trainer care for the animal?

Knowing an animal's standard behavior patterns allows a trainer to recognize when anything is out of the ordinary. These changes in behavior could signal a changing health status.

### ENRICHMENT

Dolphins at Marineland's Dolphin Conservation Center often play with toys. List some toys you see the dolphins playing with.

Why do you think the trainers give the dolphins toys?

Toys may serve as "secondary reinforcement" to dolphins. This means that, as well as food which is a primary reinforcer, toys can be used during a training session to convey to a dolphin that it has done the correct behavior.

Toy play is also a great way to develop strong bonds between dolphin and trainer.

Playing with toys may also help to stimulate a dolphin's mind and body which is important in a world where the dolphins do not need to avoid predation or chase after fish.

In place of toys like basket balls and hula hoops, wild dolphins would use things such as drift wood and sea weed to play with.

### TRAINING

Observe a training session between a trainer and a dolphin. What tools do you see being used?

Whistle (Bridge)

Target Pole

Hand Target

Fish

Ice

Toys

What are some reasons to train dolphins?

Most of the training you see at The Dolphin Conservation Center is for husbandry behaviors. These are medical behaviors that the dolphin voluntarily participates in with the trainers. In this way, a dolphin can be trained to calmly allow us to examine their bodies or treat an illness in a way that minimizes stress and increases the quality of the health care.

Training also occurs to keep the animal's mind stimulated.

What do you think are important skills for becoming a dolphin trainer?

Patience

Swimming/Diving

Observation

Communication

Attention to Detail

Teacher Copy

“People” Skills

Revised: August 2007