

Educating a Wild Dolphin

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MID*POINT staff have been doing interactive behavioural research with dolphins since 1983. In 1988 we were asked by Club Mediteranee (Club Med) to assist them with a problem at Providenciales. There they have a resort in the Turks and Caicos Islands, where a wild dolphin was interfering with their guests.

Rod Frankel, in charge of Special Projects, explained that staff turnover, done twice a year, would begin in May. He suggested we travel to the site at that time so we could interview departing staff and train incoming GO's (as they are called). We agreed to this and made the necessary arrangements for two of us.

Our greatest concern was whether or not the dolphin would be there during our stay. We proposed that our visit be a minimum of one week, a maximum of two. Club Med opted for one week.

Hedy Kinney, MID*POINT's Director of Documentation and photographer, and I were the designated team.

We went through the standard indoctrination process given to all arriving GM's (Club Med's term for guests) and were handed a welcome brochure which held little useful information about JoJo, the wild dolphin. We then looked around the location, carrying masks, fins, snorkels and camera gear with us.

After interviewing several GO's we were directed to the windsurfing area and were told to speak with Luis who had the most interactive time with JoJo. Upon arrival, we saw the dolphin within 10 yards of the shore and immediately entered the water, quickly donning our gear (Fig. 1).

I swam up to JoJo, while Kinney prepared her underwater camera to capture any interaction.

As soon as I approached him, he stopped sonaring another GM and turned to face me. Face down, breathing through the snorkel, manner passive, I kept my hands folded and my attitude non-aggressive.

JoJo came up and under me and began extreme sexual behaviour. He was readily touching me, but when I reached to touch him, he shrank back and wouldn't allow my hands to be on him. This indicated his interest in contact, but only on his terms. It

was obvious that he wanted interaction but was wary of the human hand.

It was also apparent that his penis was truncated and appeared to have been from birth rather than as a result of an accident. It lacked any scarring and was smoothly formed.

Working to shape his behaviour, I assumed an attitude that was simple and unemotional. If JoJo wanted contact in any manner, even sexual, he would have to accept my hand stroking him under the jaw. The stroking was designed to allow me to touch him in a responsible, non-aggressive manner and show him he could trust me. My lack of response (both emotional and sexual) would hopefully make him more interested in the fact that I was behaving differently than other GM's he had met.

Knowing that there was a possibility of JoJo eventually becoming interactive with scuba divers when out on the reef, I showed him my fingers in a circle. In scuba this signifies OK. I hoped he would respond to this signal and be able to recognize me more rapidly should we meet again during the week.

This later proved to have been a good idea. By our second visit to the island, he had begun to accompany Club Med dive boats to the reef and continues to do so at this time.

Throughout the first two hour session, JoJo was able to learn quickly and easily. He moderated and modified his behaviour, eventually becoming disinterested in sexual contact and more fascinated with other means of interaction provided for him.

Later that afternoon, in a second session, I again had an interaction with him. It was in front of the scuba area a far distance from our original place of meeting. As he approached me I gave him the OK signal again and he sonared my hand. He immediately continued from where we had left off before lunch and he obviously recognized me.

Unfortunately my greatest concern was validated. He came no more during our stay. Instead we spent the remaining time interviewing as many GO's as possible, trying to piece together a history of JoJo's presence in the waters of Providenciales.

Our information (gathered on that and three other trips) indicated he had been there since he was a

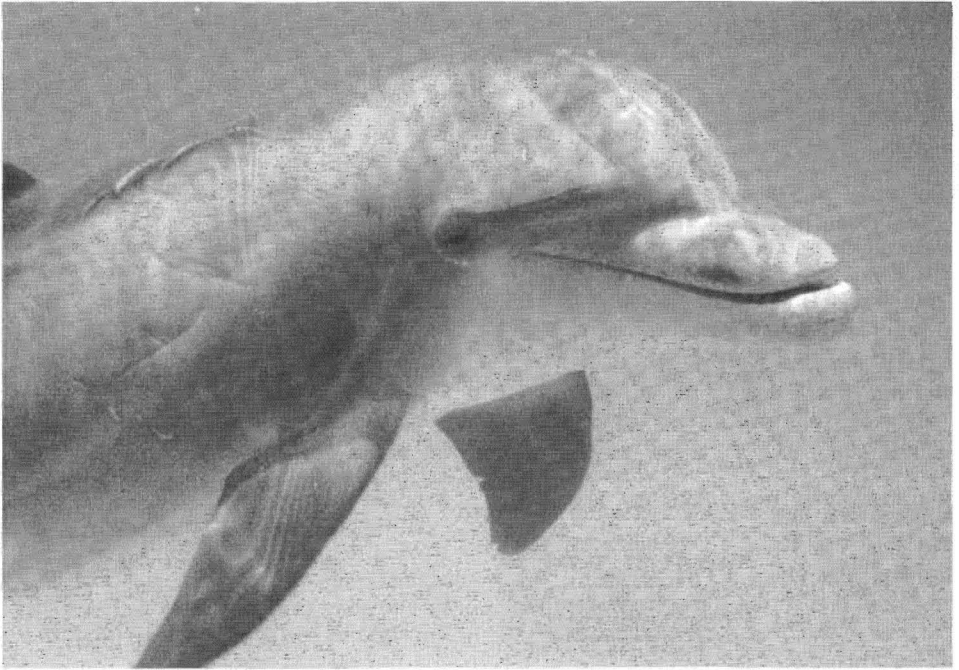


Figure 1. The wild dolphin 'JoJo'. Note: Notches on left pectoral fin and scar on back.

young animal. Boaters going through the Leeward Cut reported they would often see five dolphins. When they hit the side of their boats to attract the animals, only one would approach them. Eventually the other four left and the young dolphin remained. This was prior to the construction of Club Med's Turquoise resort.

When the Club was built, that placed humans in the water at predictable times. JoJo was first seen approaching the water-ski boats, when the drivers would rap on the gunwhales to attract him. Later on he grew comfortable enough to create his own games. He would frequently take the water-ski tow rope in his mouth and the boat would pull him through the water. Eventually he assumed total control of the interactions.

We witnessed him leaping out of the water, toppling over a GM who had waited 30 minutes to be towed. JoJo would steal a water ski, take it to the ocean floor, shove it into the sand and wait for it to spring up out of the water. We also observed him masturbating with a ski, even while there was someone standing on it.

He would routinely approach small sailboats, erect and rub his penis so violently against the centreboard that, for a time, he was breaking no less than three of them per week. As far as Club Med was concerned, JoJo was rapidly becoming less of an attraction and more of a liability.

There were also increasingly large numbers of reports to the medical office from GM's who claimed the dolphin had attacked and injured them. There were several lawsuits pending.

The Club was exempt from liability on several points. All of the beaches belong to Queen Elizabeth, and are open to everyone, therefore the Club did not own the beach front nor the water the dolphin swam in. JoJo was not advertised as an attraction, so they were not bringing people there under false pretences. Finally, the GO's did their best to warn people away from him, but to no avail.

While there we witnessed the dolphin coming into three feet of water. We saw GM's rushing into the water to be with him, touching him, trying to lure him to them. Most often we would watch as they shoved their fingers into his blowhole, his eyes and ears. It was after exhibiting great patience that JoJo would finally erupt in what appeared to be aggressive action. To the trained observer, he was clearly being defensive.

There had been reports of sexual interactions between JoJo and some of the female GM's. I interviewed two GO's who indicated they had actually witnessed such unions. Although we would normally be sceptical about this, there were two items which support such data.

The first is the small, by dolphin standards, size of his penis. This would easily accommodate a human

female. The second item is that whenever anyone, male or female, floats on their back in the water, JoJo instantly erects and begins sexual behaviour.

What was missing for the GO's and GM's was clear information on what dolphins are and how humans ought to behave around them. At that time no one on the island had any real knowledge about dolphins, other than what they learned earlier that year when they believed JoJo had been injured.

He had appeared with a barb stuck in his peduncle. The residents of the island, having originally adopted a laid back and laissez-faire attitude about JoJo, became quite agitated about what they believed was a skindiver's spear attack on him.

It was later discovered that the barb had come from a stingray. It fell out on its own and he healed naturally. Still, there was concern about what to do if he were ever to have a life threatening illness.

Upon our return to the office in Connecticut, we wrote a report and made several recommendations. We suggested that information be included in the welcome packet which was more specific. I created a universal sign which showed where not to touch a dolphin. We recommended that the GO's be trained each time there was to be a change-over. And finally, we suggested that our team return for no more than three weeks and no less than two, in order to set up a programme of controlled interaction for the animal. We would also attempt to alter his responses to aggressive moves by humans.

Club Med accepted all the recommendations and made arrangements for us to return to Provo for two weeks that August. This time we were accompanied by a third team member. Dr Karen Van Hoesen, an MD whose specialty is Emergency, Hyperbaric, and Diving medicine.

Dr Van Hoesen knew from that start that she would be incorporated into our attempt to discover and develop skills and techniques for improved interaction. Hedy Kinney was again to take slides and video in order to keep an exact visual record.

Upon our return we were handed welcome brochures and saw that the Club had included our suggested information in both English and French. The brochure now reads:

JOJO THE DOLPHIN

Here at Turkoise there is a wild Atlantic Bottlenose dolphin named JoJo. He is friendly, but definitely WILD and UNTRAINED. He is NOT Flipper. Because he is unpredictable, WE ASK YOU NOT TO TOUCH HIM.

Club Med believes in harmony with nature and so we would like to offer you more information about dolphins. Please take a moment to read this.

1. The hole at the top of his head is called a blowhole. This is his nose and he breathes air. ALL

dolphins become angry if someone touches in or around this area.

2. His eyes see like ours. The little holes just behind his eyes are his ears. Dolphins don't like to be touched there either.

3. All dolphins are playful and sexual. They don't have any limits on what is fun for them. Male dolphins, especially JoJo, like females—even humans.

4. Dolphins have a strong sonar system and love to "feel" emotional response. When it frightens a human, such as excitement or fear, it will try to get more. If it does not receive such emotional response then it will stop what it is doing and go away or do something else.

PLEASE TRY TO REMEMBER THIS IF YOU SEE JOJO. AND ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT HE IS WILD AND UNTRAINED.

The Club had posted three signs along the beach, which were copies of the illustration I had created for them. The Chef de Village also beefed up his commentary on how to behave if the dolphin were to appear.

We made arrangements to speak to the GO's, to give a slide presentation for the entire village and the GM's, to give an interview to the local cable television/radio station, as well as set up a slide presentation for the island residents at the Island Princess hotel. This was done so we could find more islanders to interview and to also give information to others who might have contact with JoJo.

That afternoon we saw JoJo's dorsal fin, bobbing up and down in front of the anchor rope of a boat 100 yards in front of the scuba shack.

From our first visit, we knew the dolphin would respond to sounds made by rattling a certain chain. I had kept the chain and had brought it back with me. We shook it in an attempt to draw him close to us. He would swim in our direction, sonar from a few yards then quickly return to the anchor.

We took a Zodiac raft and went out to check on the dolphin. We also took a video 8 camera in an underwater housing and used it to document the encounter.

On our first visit, we had been told that some of the GO's had witnessed JoJo playing with some of the marine life that passed through. That afternoon we documented JoJo playing with a seven foot, wild, nurse shark.

The video shows him shoving the shark into the arms of Dr Van Housen and a second diver. At times JoJo would check out the remora that would swim around from the rear of the shark.

Each time JoJo went to the surface for air, the shark would make a break for freedom. The dolphin would quickly head it off and then herd it over to us.

Several times JoJo would forcefully push the shark directly into the lens of the video camera. We left

when we ran out of video tape. JoJo remained to bedevil the shark for quite some time.

Upon our return to Provo for a third visit we were informed by reliable sources that JoJo had been seen killing a bull shark. He then lost a fight with a tiger shark for possession of the body. His ability to choose to destroy only made his choice to play more notable.

Two days after the first encounter with the shark, JoJo brought in a giant manta ray from the outer reef. He herded it to me three times before the ray was able to make its escape. I later learned that he would regularly bring in mantas whenever possible. Kinney was again able to document the encounter.

JoJo showed up every day but three during our stay. We set up two constants. The first was that anyone who was working with us would give him the OK sign. This was designed to create an awareness that at least three humans were acting as a group, rather than individuals.

The second was to give him a sound cue which would separate us from other humans attempting to attract him. This would alert him to our presence should he be anywhere in the vicinity.

We took the long, thin length of chain and drew it back and forth against another chain which held a swim-area buoy. We saw that even on days when he was not interested in interacting, he would come in to see us, circle, sonar and then move out of sight, as long as we used the chain to call him.

We had two types of interactions. One was purely play-time for JoJo and Dr Van Hoesen. The second would be more serious interactions between the dolphin and myself, sometimes with Van Hoesen, with Kinney documenting all encounters.

We needed to indicate to JoJo that for humans, certain behaviours were more acceptable than others. In captive situations, food is used to teach and reward selected behaviours. We could not use food compensation for an animal who had the entire ocean from which to select his menu.

Seeing how attached JoJo had become to Karen, we decided to use her as our reward system. If JoJo would behave in a responsible manner for a designated period of time, I would ask Dr Van Hoesen to play with him for 5 minutes. We would then return to work.

Kinney's photos show JoJo hauling Karen through the water with the chain around his rostrum. He chose to do this without any prompting on her part. He would take her for a 'Nantucket sleigh ride' type of pull, leaping out of the water, taking her to the ocean floor, then coming to the surface again. There obviously was a strong bond between them.

We taught him to recognize that anyone holding onto the chain would be considered a member of our communal unit. This would include Kinney, Van

Hoesen, myself, plus any GM who volunteered to work with us.

If JoJo became sexual, we would waggle a finger back and forth, speak into our snorkels or regulators, and say, 'No, no JoJo' (Fig. 2). He would immediately cease his sexual behaviour and return to play or interaction.

Part of our goal was to help JoJo behave less aggressively around the grouping GM's. We three would share ends of the chain, swim up and down the shallow areas of the beach, and wait for the GM's to approach.

We would be in no more than 3 feet of water with JoJo accompanying us on these trips. Each time we would be surrounded by shoving, yelling, probing humans, eagerly trying to touch or see the animal. All three humans sustained injuries from the GM's who shoved, kicked and pushed us out of the way.

During one interaction, we three held on to the chain, with JoJo under us, out near the relative safety of the swim line. A woman pushed past on my right side. JoJo went to investigate her, swam away, and headed directly back to me. Again the woman shoved me away and cut between us. He stopped, looked at her, swam directly forward, swept his rostrum towards her midsection and aggressively threw her clear of the water. She left abruptly and did not return. JoJo swam under us, continuing as before.

We returned to the shallow area and when we had completed three successful two-way sweeps of the beach, we would retire to a place that was off-limits to the public and reward JoJo with play-time.

At one point, Dr Van Hoesen and I circled the chain in front of JoJo. He wrapped it around his rostrum and towed us together. He did not haul us rapidly through the water as he regularly did with her alone, but adjusted his speed to my lesser abilities and pulled us smoothly and slowly. He was obviously sensitive to my limitations in the water.

During our final days on Provo, the GO's commented on how improved the dolphin's behaviour had been.

The last day brought us our most interesting encounter, fully documented on video tape and slide film.

Dr Van Hoesen was on scuba, doing video work. Kinney was using her Nikonis V camera. We were both on snorkel. JoJo came up to Van Hoesen and became sexual with her scuba tank. I alerted her to the situation. She waggled her finger and told him no. He then came to the surface to be with me.

Over the days I had begun to play a specific game with him. There was a cluster of concrete blocks where he liked to sonar its marine inhabitants. I would take the chain, make the OK sign, sight the block and drop the balled chain 18 feet down to it. JoJo would watch me as I kept on doing this, then follow me down and up.



Figure 2. 'No, no, JoJo'. Signal to cease.

After being rebuked by Karen, the dolphin decided to join me in my game.

I would wait for him to appear and see that his attention was upon my hand. I would then make the OK sign, drop the chain and make a leisurely surface dive down to the blocks. He followed me down, came to me, wrapped his body around my back, erected his penis and gently touched my thigh in a non-sexual manner. Clearly he was playing tag (Fig. 3).

When I would reach the cinder block and grab the chain, he would move in front of me. I then would move forward and scratch him on his stomach, between his pectoral fins. We did this over and over again, more than twenty times in an hour. Sometimes I would swim to the surface holding his rostrum close to my heart, or my lungs, with the intention of having him listen to the inner workings of my body.

During the second hour of this game, I made a mistake. I was slow in grabbing the chain. By the time I reached to scratch, he had already moved back. I seam forward, aggressively and was able to touch him in the usual spot, then headed to the surface. The video shows this happening, then him heading back to the cinder blocks. He began to circle them, faster and faster, stirring up the sand as he moved. In his agitation his high, squeaking sounds can be heard. As he headed for the surface I could see his altered behaviour in his increased swimming speed.

I understood that my behaviour was the cause of the problem, so it would also have to be the solution.

Keeping my arms close to my body, I began a descent, moving very slowly and deliberately, always allowing him to be in control. The video shows him returning to a calmer swimming posture within three chain drop sequences.

Interestingly, he had created most of the rules for my behaviour during this encounter. The game was not a random interaction in which I had set the guidelines and course of action. His behaviour indicated his preferences for the course and direction of my actions. Under these conditions, he had been able to be self-controlling in a possibly difficult situation.

Kinney and I returned to Provo later that year as a guest of a local island foundation. I spoke to students at both high schools and helped to educate them about their unique dolphin. We also provided information and support for the creation of a brochure which is now being distributed island-wide to all who come to Providenciales. A proposal for a project involving research, education and medical support was also created, but not pursued.

At this time Club Med no longer has a Special Projects department. They had invited us to return and continue our efforts, but had to cancel because of lack of funds.

I returned to Provo for the last time in May 1989. With me was Allison Kritzstein, an intern with MID*POINT. She served as a witness to our further interactions with JoJo.



Figure 3. Playing 'catch'.

The dolphin showed up the second day of the trip. I entered the water with the usual mask, fins and snorkel, plus the chain. Swimming out to the swimmer's rope, I rattled the chain with the same rhythm as in my previous encounters. JoJo immediately separated himself from other people and approached me.

He sonored me diligently and then presented himself to be stroked. Having done this I gave him the familiar OK sign. His eyes widened and then closed. I jumbled the chain up into a ball and dropped it to the cinder blocks below, then gave the sign and made my leisurely descent.

JoJo swam down with me, using the same behaviours as the year before. We did this for more than 30 minutes. He then left to examine other swimmers.

I waited a few moments and then rattled the chain again. Instantly he was at my side. This time, when I dropped the chain and flipped down, he altered the interaction. He swam to the bottom, came up to me, head first and pushed his belly towards me as I was descending. I had to literally move down his body, grabbing him hand over hand and pull myself down to the bottom. As soon as I had arrived at the cinder block, he would surface and then come down behind me and touch my left thigh as was his usual behaviour.

Throughout the week he would continue to modify this play interaction in small, but subtle ways.

During that time I would observe his play interaction with Bill, a scuba instructor. The two would stop at a distance, face each other, then head directly at one another, like trains approaching on a collision course. At the last minute, each would veer away to the side. JoJo seemed to truly enjoy this game.

I eventually attempted to duplicate this behaviour but he would not take part in it. It was clear that he had specific play interaction assignments for specific people.

Another favourite game of his was to play hide and seek around the submerged pilings. He would do this with anyone with enough energy to play. He also was interested in a game of catch the ball. This he did with a soft and spongy Nerf Ball that had been given to him by a GM that week.

JoJo was still knocking people off water-skis and was still attacking innocent swimmers. I was asked to interview a GM from Lima, Peru.

She had been swimming along the swimmer's line, far away from shore. JoJo had been in the shallows and had been surrounded by GM's. He left and encountered her. He began to attack her, butting her above the breasts and on her hips. She screamed for her husband and the more she yelled his name, the harder the dolphin hit her. Her husband's name was JoJo, a most unusual coincidence.

When the man attempted to help her, the dolphin began to include him in his attack. Eventually, one of

the water-ski GO's swam to them, guiding them into the shore. The woman showed me large traumas all over her chest and hips. There was no doubt that she had been a victim of an unprovoked (by her) attack.

While there on my previous visits I had heard that there was possibly a second wild Tursiops which was attacking swimmers. I interviewed a new GO, a nurse who, an hour before, had been violently encountered by a dolphin which she described as looking different than JoJo.

During that last visit a scuba instructor who was quite familiar with JoJos colourations and markings happened to observe a second dolphin coming in at close range to divers on the reef. His description matched that given by the nurse and was totally different than JoJo's appearance. He also commented that the second dolphin's melon appeared to be more of a double bulge or hump and that he was darker and more scarred than JoJo.

The last day that I was there, I spent over four hours with JoJo. There was little doubt that although he had met thousands of people since I had last seen him in August of 1988, he definitely recognized me. Whether it was because of the chain, my behaviour or because of some memory retention and sonar identification, I cannot say.

I did find that he had not only matured, but had become more sophisticated in his approach to interacting with humans. I seriously doubt that my original efforts would have been successful if I had met him when he was older. His behaviour indicated that he had become a total master over the GM's whenever they were in the water.

Because he has little regard for the dangers that a moving boat and an engine present, there is a great possibility that he will not have a long life span. Still, for a researcher who would like to accumulate raw data from interactions with a non-captive Tursiops,

JoJo presents a fascinating and rewarding opportunity. Certainly it can be said that interactions with him pose more questions than answers.

This paper was presented at the EAAM conference in Lipperswill, Switzerland in March 1990. At that time I was approached by Mr Peter Bloom of Dolphin Services (Bloom UK) and we discussed a similar situation that was occurring in Amble, off the eastern coast of England.

I detailed what had been done on Providenciales to raise awareness of JoJo and explained my recommendations for seeking funds to support such a programme.

I later sent a written, in-depth set of suggestions on how to increase education about the wild dolphin 'Freddie', a sample of the sign I had created for Club Med, and ideas on how to find public support and funding for such an endeavour.

Mr Bloom wrote back in August 1990, to say that he had successfully found plenty of people who were interested in sponsoring a programme, and his only cost was in time.

The signs had been altered to fit their needs and been posted along the proper areas.

The next step would be to attempt to have the local government make by-law changes and perhaps set up a volunteer warden programme to try and control 'the circus that surrounds this animal during the daylight areas'.

As humans and dolphins continue to come in contact with one another, it is important that communities recognize the potential for both education and environmental awareness that such a situation may afford.

In his own small way, JoJo's presence in Providenciales has led to the creation of such programmes.