

River Guardians Dolphin Watch Project



Caring for the Swan Canning Riverpark

River dolphins in research spotlight



A new research project focussing on one of the Swan Canning Riverpark's most iconic species is giving Perth residents a unique chance to be part of the action.

Murdoch University's Dr Hugh Finn and Dr Chandra Salgado from Curtin University are leading research into Perth's river dolphins and the way human activities can affect them. The project, launched earlier in the year, builds on previous research and has linked with the Swan River Trust River Guardians community engagement program.

Guarding our dolphins

River Guardians Dolphin Watch was launched on April 1 by Environment Minister Donna Faragher with members recording details of dolphin sightings in the Swan and Canning rivers. Dr Finn said public involvement was a great boost to the research project.

It allows a wide spread of information to be gathered on how dolphins use the Canning and upper reaches of the Swan River – areas that experience problems such as low oxygen and algal blooms.

River residents

Dr Finn's earlier studies of Perth dolphins have uncovered some fascinating facts about our riverine neighbours. There is a community of about 25 'resident' dolphins in the Swan River – animals that use the river on a near-daily basis. This group includes several adult females with dependent calves, one or two 'alliances' of tightly-bonded adult males, and a large group of sociable youngsters.

Dr Hugh said many, if not all, resident dolphins probably grew up in the Swan River and local knowledge was important for their survival. "Like any good fishermen, it takes time to learn where and when fish are available," he said.

Dolphins were identified by the distinctive shape of their dorsal fins and valuable information about their range, habitat, behaviour and feeding was collected.

But while dolphins playing in the rivers are an iconic and much loved sight, Dr Finn said it is also one that could be at risk.

The river dolphin community is small, and dependent on a handful of females. Living in an urban environment, they can experience pressure from loss of habitat, decreasing prey, entanglement, boat strikes and noise.

Dolphins key to understanding

Recognising their potential as indicators of river health, the dolphins are now the focus of a new research project. The project aims to provide key information on dolphin ecology and interactions with human activities in the Swan and Canning rivers, up-stream of Perth waters. Dr Finn said the peak outcome of the study would be a comprehensive understanding of dolphin status in the Swan River and the effects of human activities on the mammals.

Be part of the action

Dolphin Watch is open to River Guardian members. Volunteers undertake training before they begin monitoring. It is currently free to [become a River Guardian](#) and members take part in free, fun river events as well opportunities to network with others and volunteer in river restoration and training activities.

To find out more visit www.riverguardians.com or call the Swan River Trust on (08) 9278 0900.

Caring for our dolphins

1. **Keep your distance** – never approach a wild dolphin and make sure you keep at least 30 metres away if you're in the water or 100 metres if you're in a boat.
2. **Brake for dolphins** - dolphins often form resting groups in the middle reaches of the estuary, so keep an eye out for dolphins, and slow down if you spot any.
3. **Never feed dolphins** – it is illegal and leaves them vulnerable to entanglement, boat strikes, and disease.
4. **Fish responsibly** - dolphins, particularly calves, can get tangled in fishing line. Make sure you dispose of unwanted monofilament line carefully.

