

Killer Whales Speak To Humans! Or Did They?

Scientists record an orca saying "Hello", "Bye bye" and "One, two".

Before you read the complete article, look at this vocabulary and find it in the text:

to carry out: to complete a task or job

pod: a small group of marine animals

to match (something): to make harmonious or equal, to correspond with

to mimic: to imitate actions or words

to warn (against something) to inform about possible danger or problems

In recent years, certain species of fish have been filmed **carrying out** elaborate tasks such as using tools to crack open shellfish or drawing complex patterns on the ocean floor. Others have been recorded changing colour to catch the attention of octopuses and then use gestures to give them instructions in order to work together to catch smaller fish. These extraordinary discoveries demonstrate that life in the oceans is far more intelligent than was previously thought.

And if marine life can use sign language to foment team work under the waves, is there any chance that, perhaps one day, 'spoken' communication with humans could be achieved?

The sounds that most animals use to communicate are innate, not learned. However, a few species, including humans, can imitate new sounds and learn to use them in appropriate social contexts. This ability, known as vocal learning, is one of the foundations of language. Vocal learning has been observed in bats, some birds, and cetaceans, a group that includes whales and dolphins.

Members of the dolphin family have specific sounds for specific objects. They have dialects. They transmit behaviours. In other words, they have culture.

In the wild, off the New Zealand coast, false killer whales (a species of dolphin, not whale) and a large **pod** of bottlenose dolphins, have been observed joining together every year to hunt and socialise. Individuals across the two species seem to recognise each other and communicate in what is possibly a 'common tongue'.

One group of killer whales (or orcas, the largest species in the dolphin family) that was held in captivity with bottlenose dolphins changed their characteristic repertoire of clicks, whistles and pulses to **match** those emitted by their dolphin

neighbours. Later, even more interestingly, they learned completely new sounds that had been taught to the dolphins by humans before the orcas were introduced to the group.

But having vocal learning skills doesn't necessarily mean that these animals use language in the same way that humans do. However, these skills do indicate a high level of neural plasticity, the ability to change circuits in the brain to incorporate new information.

And recently, new research has revealed that orcas are able to imitate human speech. Wikie, a 14-year-old female orca living in an aquarium in France, has been recorded imitating the words "hello", "one, two" and "bye bye".

Only a fraction of the animal kingdom can **mimic** human speech. But despite the morphology of orcas being very different, Wikie has been able to produce a sound that comes close to what humans produce.

Are we on the verge of being able to talk to the animals just like Doctor Dolittle did in the popular series of children's books? Unfortunately, researchers **warn** against the idea of humans and killer whales having a chat about the weather any time soon. "We have no evidence that they understand what 'hello' actually means," they say. Perhaps that's for the best. I think there are a lot of animals out there that could be quite angry about human behaviour!

Written by ECP coach Rob Hextall Video: <https://youtu.be/je3muwxBBU>

"Let's chat about that!"

Write your opinions in an email and send them to your ECP coach!

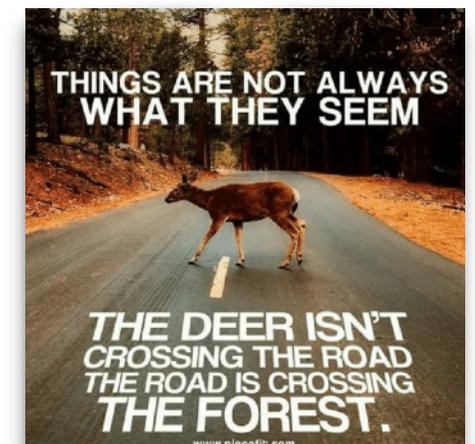
- Have you ever read a Doctor Dolittle book? (Or seen a film?)
- What animals do you know that can mimic other animals?
- Will humans ever have a meaningful conversation with animals?
- The article says that "members of the dolphin family have culture." What does that really mean? Do you agree?
- Should we give animals more rights and protect them better?



Killer whale = Orca



What if animals could give their opinion?



COFFEE SATURDAYS

Come and socialise in English!



The first **Saturday** of every month from 11:00 to 12:30

Where? Panadería Bertiz, C/ Francia 23

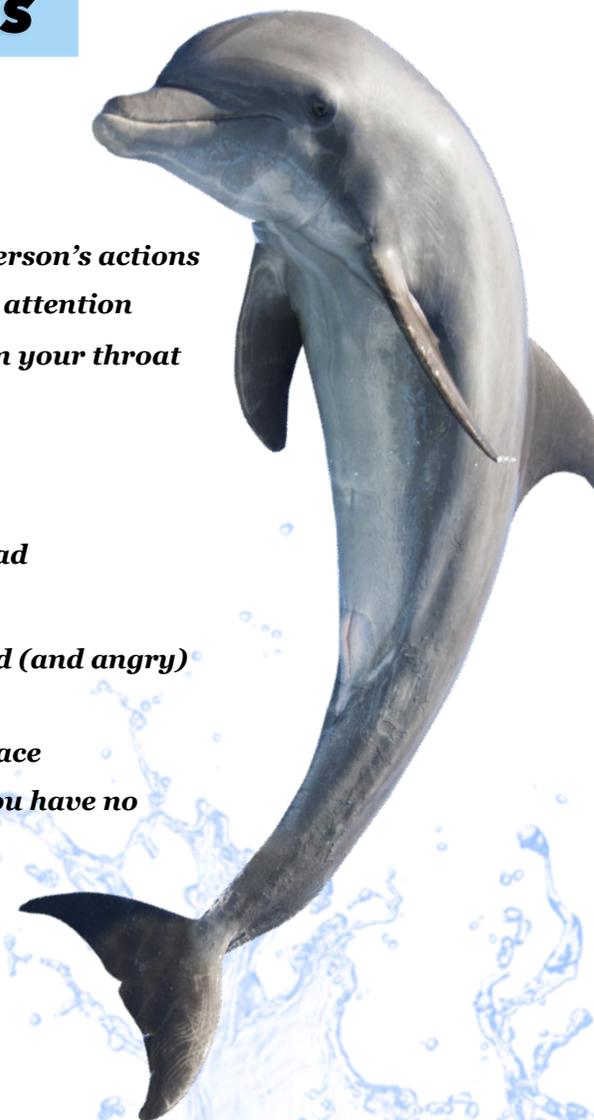


"iLook, iThink, iSpeak"

Express Yourself Better

Idioms with animals

- ▶ *donkey's years* = a very long time
- ▶ *donkey-work* = the hard part of a job
- ▶ *to talk the hind legs off a donkey* = to talk a lot
- ▶ *a scapegoat* = a person you blame for another person's actions
- ▶ *a red herring* = something that attracts people's attention
- ▶ *to have a frog in one's throat* = to have phlegm in your throat
- ▶ *the lion's share* = the biggest part of something
- ▶ *to come out of one's shell* = to become less shy
- ▶ *to be a bookworm* = to like reading
- ▶ *to be mad as a March hare* = to be completely mad
- ▶ *to be a busy bee* = to enjoy being busy or active
- ▶ *to have a bee in one's bonnet (about something)* = to be obsessed (and angry) with something
- ▶ *to be packed like sardines* = to have a lot of people in a small space
- ▶ *to shed crocodile tears* = to cry (or appear to) when in reality you have no feelings
- ▶ *to be like a bear with a sore head* = to be rude, in a bad mood
- ▶ *to be eagle-eyed* = to be very good at seeing or noticing things
- ▶ *to have bats in the belfry* = to be eccentric or insane
- ▶ *monkey business* = dishonest or bad behaviour
- ▶ *brass monkey weather* = very cold weather
- ▶ *to have ants in one's pants* = to be very restless
- ▶ *to learn something parrot-fashion* = to learn something by repetition
- ▶ *a white elephant* = an object that is useless and expensive to maintain



When? The last **Friday** of every month

Next date: 29th June

19:30 to 21:30 - It's **FREE!**

Where? The ECP Hub