

## How to Tell the Difference between Stranded Dolphins vs. Dolphins Engaged in Normal Behavior

Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are the species of dolphin commonly seen along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts and they routinely travel, feed and socialize very close to shore. Bottlenose dolphins in this geographic region often exhibit "strand" or "mud" feeding, a unique hunting behavior in which the dolphins work together in small groups to herd fish into shallow water to feed. This behavior can seem alarming to watch if people are not familiar with it since the dolphins often work in very shallow water and actually beach themselves as they chase fish onto shore. This behavior is frequently observed on Grand Isle Beach, specifically in the state park region, where the shallow waters are perfect for this type of feeding scenario.

The Wildlife Branch and Marine Mammal Stranding Network are prepared to respond to live stranded dolphins, and encourage anyone in the field (from clean-up crews to the general public) to carefully observe the animals before calling the Hotline to avoid false alarms.



*Bottlenose dolphins engaged in normal "strand feeding" behavior. The animals are not in distress and can get back to deeper water on their own.*

A dolphin in **distress** typically:

- Is not feeding on fish
- Is either rolling in the surf or headed directly into the beach (and is not swimming in and out of the shallow water actively)
- Shows outward physical signs of being in distress, including lethargy, labored or frequent breathing, or injuries.

To report a dolphin or other species of wildlife in distress, please call:

**1-866-557-1401**



**Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**