

ORCAS

BELONG IN THE SEA NOT IN CAPTIVITY

This infographic shows orcas natural adaptations for life in the oceans, and the harmful effects of captivity.

CULTURE

Orca pods learn complex behaviors taught specifically across generations

REPRODUCTION

Females mature and become sexually active at 15 years old, surrounded by family to help with birth and care

LIFESPAN Females average 50 years (max 80-90)
Males average 30 years (max 50-60)

MENTAL

Highly intelligent
Social hierarchy
Complex language

DORSAL FIN

Up to 6 feet high

SKIN

Depth and water protect orcas from UV sunlight

HEALTH

After the first 6 months of birth, mortality rates decline and are lowest for orcas 12-20 years old

ACOUSTIC

Primary sense for communicating, hunting, and exploring the ocean realm around them

TEETH

Cone shaped for catching live prey

EFFECTS IN CAPTIVITY

Boredom, depression, psychosis, aggression, bullying from unfamiliar orcas and isolation from family

Nearly all captive male orcas have a *collapsed dorsal fin*, uncommon in wild populations

Exposure to UV sunlight from shallow pools and unnatural water clarity increases risks of sunburns and cataracts

Orcas from different pods, languages, and cultures forced to coexist in small tanks

Worn down teeth from grinding on metal tank cages, often leading to infections

Females in captivity are often artificially inseminated at very young ages (as young as 7), with limited to no family support. The only known cases of mother orcas rejecting their calves has occurred in captivity

Captive orcas have an average mortality rate three times higher than those in the wild

Concrete enclosures limit orcas ability to fully utilize their most important sense

A published study in Marine Mammal Science found the average lifespan of orcas in captivity to be 12 years old.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR ORCAS?

After a life of captivity, many wonder, what's next?

- 1. POTENTIAL RELEASE**
For some orcas, such as Lolita and Corky, scientists know their native pods and these animals still recognize their pod's vocalizations. There may be hope for reintroduction if they can reintegrate with their families.
- 2. RETIREMENT TO SEASIDE SANCTUARIES**
Most orcas born and raised in captivity do not possess the necessary skills to survive on their own in the wild. Coastal sea pens with continued human care would allow orcas to live out their lives feeling the natural sights, sounds, smells, and rhythmic ebbs and flows of their ocean home.
- 3. EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION**
Aquarium facilities can be connected to seaside sanctuaries, following up with the orcas, observing and educating the public about them in a more natural environment. Interactive technologies can replace animal exhibits, allowing people to engage in learning about marine mammal behavior and conservation, instead of being spectators. Conservation efforts should focus on protecting wild populations from increasing human threats such as food security, dams, pollution, boating, and others.



Jean-Michel Cousteau with Keiko, the orca of "Free Willy" fame. Keiko was rehabilitated and released into his native waters of Iceland.
Photo by © Tom Ordway

"The time has come to view the captivity of cetaceans as part of our past, not a tragic part of our future"
- Jean-Michel Cousteau

BRIEF HISTORY

The first orcas were captured for the entertainment industry in 1961. One of the most infamous captures occurred in 1970 in the Pacific Northwest when over 80 orcas were driven into a cove using helicopters, boats and explosives. Separating mothers from calves, the young were taken, many of which did not survive the transport. Lolita is the sole surviving orca of that capture, where she is now alone in the Miami Seaquarium. Today, her native population is endangered.

This is not conservation, it is cruelty.



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