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## [Dolphins Identify Themselves with Names](#)

### *But do they gossip?*

A dolphin chooses its own name as an infant and uses it throughout its life. "It seems like the animals hear what's around them, and then they make up their own whistle," said Vincent Janik of the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. "They either develop something original [...] or they base it on parts of the whistles around them." Scientists have long known that dolphins use names, but they have now found that it isn't the actual sound that matters, but the content (or "modulation"). Each dolphin has a distinct voice. Scientists had recorded the sounds, then digitally removed the voice features of each call, and then played back the calls to the dolphins. In 9 of 14 cases, the dolphin turned toward the speaker if it heard a whistle resembling the name of a close relative. "Every dolphin has its own voice," said Janik to LiveScience. "But we removed those features and showed that the animals are actually paying attention to the modulation and not the voice." This makes dolphins even more advanced than monkeys. Dolphins create their individual names to communicate where they are. This is a way of surpassing the visual difficulties posed by the water. Young dolphins create their calls to stand apart their closest relatives and use them to let other dolphins know they're nearby. A dolphin will also call out its name if it's lost and distressed, hoping relatives will come to its aid. However, the capacity to distinguish the name itself (the content) from the sound may mean that dolphins do more than that. It may mean one could call another one by using its name. And it may even mean that two dolphins could speak about a third referring to it by its name. The capacity of discerning the modulation from the sound is a necessary condition for such a communication. But if they actually do such things still remains to be seen. However, one could ask what this capacity is good for if not for calling each other of maybe even for talking about third parties. So, do dolphins gossip? We don't know yet. The dolphin vocabulary is very large and scientists have no idea what most sounds stand for. "Their repertoire of calls probably numbers in the hundreds," Janik said. "Some of them are food calls, but for most of them we have no ideas what they're for."