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Picture Books

A Charm of Dolphins: The Threatened Life of a Flippered Friend
Howard Hall
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"Flipper" may be the most widely known human name for a dolphin, but readers may be surprised to learn that dolphins name themselves with a unique signature whistle. "Members of its social group recognize each other by their whistle names, not merely by the sound of a familiar dolphin voice," the author writes. This tidbit is among the fascinating facts about dolphins that fill this new book in an outstanding wildlife series presented by Jean-Michel Cousteau.

Hall, a diver, biologist, wildlife author, and Emmy-award filmmaker, shares his knowledge and observations of these popular mammals. Highly intelligent, dolphins have self-awareness that allows them to recognize themselves in mirrors; use echolocation to hunt prey, enjoy touch, and know their environment; and perform thrilling leaps and spins in the air. Some species leap higher than a two-story building. Others spin like tops.

Hall's personal experiences with dolphins are delightful. In these pages he plunges readers into the depths of the sea for a game of keep-away with a red scarf he gave his "old friends." The dolphins have game rules and keep the scarf just out of Hall's reach, then let him "capture it." He gives it back, but when he comes up for air, one of the dolphins surfaces, "smiles," and returns the scarf.

Hall and other photographers offer remarkable photographs showing various species of dolphins socializing, playing games, and doing aerobatics. One shocking photograph depicts the bloody massacre when Japanese fishermen senselessly corralled and speared hundreds of dolphins—a reminder that worldwide threats against the species are still grave. The author also includes information about how to learn more about dolphin protection, an index and glossary, and list of surprising facts. Readers will want to hear dolphins' whistles, and respond by preserving them and their increasingly fragile environment.