



## JUVENILE TRANSITION: JAX'S JOURNEY FROM BOY TO MAN

One of the huge benefits to DRC's big, inter-connected, natural lagoons is that they give us the opportunity to have large and/or variable groups of dolphins living together. We can not only watch young dolphins grow and learn from their mothers in nursery groups, but also observe them as they mature in their social relationships and change their "roommates" appropriately upon growing older.

Dolphins go through two major social transitions throughout their lives. After spending an average of five years nursing in the wild from their mothers and learning important life and survival skills, young wild dolphins transfer into a juvenile pod. These groups include both genders. In this pod they continue to learn and hone those important life skills with dolphins similar in age. Once sexually mature, male dolphins transition to bachelor pods consisting of two or more male dolphins while the females return to maternity groups, sometimes the same ones in which they were born. At Dolphin Research Center, we place our dolphins in groupings similar to those found in the wild, giving them the same chance to

develop social skills they need to grow into well-rounded adults. This also gives our guests an opportunity to understand how dolphins in the wild live and develop socially.

Jax's life journey began in the waters around Jacksonville, Florida. In his first months of life, he received all the nourishment he needed by nursing from his mother. He may have even begun to learn some rudimentary fishing techniques and social skills. At around eight to ten months Jax's life altered dramatically. People in the area spotted him all by himself, missing some of his dorsal fin, part of his pectoral flipper, and part of his tail. As dolphin calves in the wild depend on their mothers for an average



Perhaps Jax and A.J. (pictured l-r) use the buddy system to synchronize this great dive.

of five years, it was clear that Jax was not at a stage to remain on his own. We are all still amazed that as young as he was, he had learned just enough, and luckily survived until he was rescued.

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## DRC'S FLIPPERED FAMILY GOES TO CANADA!

Yes, indeed, you read that right. Canada! Our flippered friends took their first excursion to the land of Mounties, maple syrup and hockey by embracing some 21st century technology. With a web cam lagoon side, Kilo, Cayo, Kibby, Tanner and A.J. beamed through the Internet in order to reach children who could not visit us!

Since attending and being inspired by *DolphinLab* herself, France La Fleur, a Canadian citizen, had the dream of

exposing children in her own country to the wonders of marine mammals through Dolphin Research Center. She carried this flame of inspiration for a number of years and together we made this dream come true in April of 2010. Not only did France bring children to DRC for a *DolphinLab*, she worked with Kirsten Donald, DRC's Director of Education, and Jesse Fox, DRC's Information Technology Coordinator to organize three distance learning

events for their classmates back home throughout the course of the week.

Kilo and Mandy Rodriguez, Co-founder & Chief Operating Officer of DRC, were the first to land electronically in Quebec during the *DolphinLab* students' sea lion demonstration. While Kilo showed off the unique features that make him a sea lion and amazingly adapted for land and sea, Mandy spoke

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on his behalf to simultaneously inspire both the students onsite as well as those in the cold north.

On the second day of 'Operation Canada' Cayo and Loriel Caprio, Assistant Director of Animal Training, invited *DolphinLab* and their Canadian

classmates dock side to observe new training principles in action. Cayo was eager to show off her progress on her flip in training amidst shouts of excitement coming from *DolphinLab* as well as through the Internet of those watching from the classroom.

The last day of our distance learning adventure gave the school children back home the opportunity to see their friends in *DolphinLab* try their flippers at training. Each student came down on the dock to say hello to Kibby, A.J. and Tanner and ask them for several of their favorite behaviors while Mandy narrated their experience and fielded questions from the students in Canada.

Each presenter wore a headset which allowed them to interact with the students in their home classrooms. They described things as they happened and responded to the inquiries that popped into the brains of those watching. Frequently asked questions included: "How long do sea lions live?"; "How long do dolphins live?"; "What do dolphins eat?"; "How do you recognize different dolphins?"; "Are they mammals or fish?"; "How do they swim so fast?"; and "How smart are dolphins?"

True to our mission, each session included what threats marine mammals



*Assistant Director of Animal Training Loriel Caprio (seated left) instructs the class in how to station and signal Cayo while Director of Education Kirsten Donald (standing left on dock) explains the process to the students watching from Canada. France LaFleur, the Canadian educator who organized the group and DRC's IT Coordinator Jesse Fox (right on platform) made sure the technology worked.*

face and what everyone can do to help them and their environment, including admiring wild animals from a distance and the importance of "Reduce, Reuse & Recycle". What was most powerful was the connection forged over a vast distance between the students in Canada and the animals and staff of DRC. Though thousands of miles away, technology enabled us to demonstrate the love and respect DRC holds for our marine friends and their environment.

The impact on both *DolphinLab* students and their friends back home was evident in their applause and exclamations upon seeing Kilo, Cayo, Kibby, A.J. and Tanner, as well as the questions they asked. The inspiration they had been given shined through when the visiting *DolphinLab* students ended each session with a personalized cheer about DRC which was then echoed from their classroom counterparts in Canada.

So, where to next? Stay tuned and see. Thanks to modern technology our flippered friends are riding the wave of the future and traveling the world. Who knows? They could land at a school near you!

-Kirsten Donald

## Adopt-A-Dolphin

You can sponsor your favorite dolphin or sea lion at DRC through our Adopt-A-Dolphin or Sea Lion program. Experience the warm feeling that comes with knowing that you are helping to provide for the care and feeding of your friend. Your tax-deductible donation for a membership will help us to fulfill our promise to provide the finest home humanly possible for our marine mammal family. Memberships are available in several levels:

**E-Dolfriend (\$15)** – receive an electronic membership that includes a subscription to our monthly e-newsletter and an e-mailed full-color certificate with your favorite dolphin or sea lion's picture and a biography about your friend you can print out at home.

**Dolfriend (\$50)** – receive a subscription to the *Dolphin Society* newsletter, our e-newsletter, a 10% discount on most gift shop items, a color certificate with your dolphin or sea lion's picture, a biography about your friend, free admission for two to DRC for one year, and one free guest pass.

**Pod Pal (\$100)** – receive all the benefits of a Dolfriend membership plus a subscription to our *Gray Cross* newsletter and free admission to DRC for up to four people for one year.

**Parent (\$240)** – Provide the ultimate support for your friend by pledging \$20 per month to sponsor one of their meals each month. You will receive all the benefits of a Pod Pal membership plus free admission for up to five people for one year and silver bucket stickers for your certificate to represent the meals you provided for your dolphin or sea lion friend.

Adopt-A-Dolphin or Sea Lion memberships make a great gift and can be purchased via our website at [www.dolphins.org](http://www.dolphins.org), by phone (305) 289-1121 X229, or by mailing your check or credit card number to DRC, 58901 Overseas Highway, Grassy Key, FL 33050. Please note that memberships are not transferable and the member must present photo identification for admission.

[www.dolphins.org](http://www.dolphins.org)

Innerspace or cyberspace, the dolphins of Dolphin Research Center look forward to your visit.