

Dolphins may have a spoken language, new research suggests

By Ben Westcott, CNN

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Story highlights

Dolphins may communicate in different pulses which resemble words and sentences

But scientist says more, open-water testing will be needed to confirm dolphin language

(CNN) — A conversation between dolphins may have been recorded by scientists for the first time, a Russian researcher claims.

Two adult Black Sea bottlenose dolphins, named Yasha and Yana, didn't interrupt each other during an interaction taped by scientists and may have formed words and sentences with a series of pulses, [Vyacheslav Ryabov](#) says in a new paper.

"The (pulse) exchanges reminds us of an exchange with sentences between two people," Ryabov told CNN.

Joshua Smith, a research fellow at Murdoch University Cetacean Research Unit, says there will need to be more research before scientists can be sure whether dolphins are chatting.

"I think it's very early days to be drawing conclusions that the dolphins are using signals in a kind of language context, similar to humans," he told CNN.

'A highly developed spoken language'?



Bottlenose dolphins leap off the Southern California coast.

There are two different types of noises dolphins use for communication, whistles and clicks, also known as pulses.

Using new recording techniques, Ryabov separated the individual "non coherent pulses" the two dolphins made and theorized each pulse was a word in the dolphins' language, while a collection of pulses is a sentence.

"Dolphins are producing these packs of pulses without interrupting each other which let's us suggest that each of the dolphins listen to one another before it starts its own pack of pulses," he told CNN.

In his paper, published in the St. Petersburg Polytechnical University Journal: Physics and Mathematics last month, Ryabov said the pulses could be considered a highly developed spoken language.

He called for humans to create a device by which people could communicate with dolphins.

"Humans must take the first step to establish relationships with the first intelligent inhabitants of the planet Earth by creating devices capable of overcoming the barriers that stand in the way of ... communications between dolphins and people," he said.

Smith said while the results were an exciting advance in the under-researched field of dolphin communication, the results first needed to be replicated in open water environments.

"If we boil it down we pretty much have two animals in an artificial environment where reverberations are a problem ... It wouldn't make much sense for animals (in a small area) to make sounds over each other because they wouldn't get much (sonar) information," he said.

"It would be nice to see a variety of alternate explanations to this rather than the one they're settling on."