



Universal Diver Training Press Release

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For More Information, Contact:
Bob Sheridan, President • Universal Diver Training, Inc.
Coconut Creek, Florida • Phone 954-974-5709

In Broward County, Florida, SCUBA Divers And Snorkelers Thrill To Rare Encounter With Atlantic Spotted Dolphins

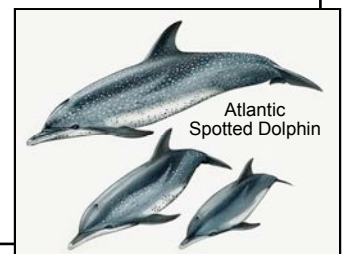
POMPANO BEACH, FLORIDA -- A pod of wild Atlantic spotted dolphins thrilled a group of snorkelers and SCUBA divers with a dazzling display of aquatic showmanship on February 28th. A squadron of twenty of the playful marine mammals first buzzed two charter boats, then offered the divers a rare chance for an up close and personal encounter in Broward County's blue waters.

Bob Sheridan is president of Universal Diver Training, Inc. After the encounter he revealed, "I've been teaching scuba diving in Broward County for over 20 years now. This is the first time I've seen Atlantic spotted dolphins in our waters. We were treated to an incredible experience, one that's rare for our corner of the Atlantic Ocean."

On February 28th, Bob Sheridan is cruising off Pompano Beach in the dive boat *Tonto*. Onboard is a small group of local divers and students from California. Nearby, the captain of the *Coral Princess* is positioning his boat to put a group of snorkelers in the water.

The air temperature is a cheery 75 degrees, and the water is three degrees warmer. Winds are light, and the seas calm--a perfect day for snorkeling and diving (and for gloating about the winter Florida weather).

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Bob Sheridan spots three dorsal fins knifing through the water 25 yards off *Tonto's* starboard bow. He yells, "Dolphins at one o'clock." In unison, the three fins peel off to the right and submerge as *Tonto* plows straight ahead. The fins reappear at the stern, and three shadows--two big and one small--race up alongside to catch up with *Tonto's* bow wake. As the torpedoes take turns surfing the pressure wave, we note the spots on their backs. We realize we're observing a species of dolphin that's a stranger to our local waters. This sighting of two adults and a calf off Pompano Beach could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

We glance back to the *Coral Princess*. There's a giant commotion on the deck of the flattop catamaran. *There... There! Over there!* The tourists are pointing and shouting and spotting more fins than you see at a Jimmy Buffett concert. A crazy merry-go-round of dolphins circles the *Coral Princess* as snorkeler after snorkeler geronimoes into the water, clearing the deck.

The divers on the *Tonto* jump into the frothy fray. Camcorders roll to capture the show on tape. Are the dolphins playing underwater chicken with the humans? Are the porpoises trying to amuse the *homo sapiens* with a warp-speed game of aquatic peek-a-boo? Is it man versus dolphin in a friendly contest of dogfighting skills, a H₂O version of Top Gun? Wanna bet who's in charge of this wild play date? The smart money's not on the humans.

The saltwater circus continues for an astounding twenty minutes. As if on command from an unseen AWACS flight controller, the entire squadron disengages simultaneously and disappears into the blue, leaving us to contemplate what we just experienced.

Tursiops truncatus--the bottlenose--is the species of dolphin most often sighted off South Florida. Boaters rarely spot more than two or three at a time, and the bottlenose dolphins usually race off after a quick frolic in a vessel's bow wake. By the time snorkelers don their gear, the elusive bottlenose creatures are long gone.

Wild bottlenose dolphins seem reluctant to interact with swimmers. But *Stenella frontalis*--the Atlantic spotted dolphin--appears to enjoy swimming eye to eye with humans. The fun-loving sea mammals are intelligent, friendly and playful.

Twenty years ago, studies estimated the Bahamian population of Atlantic spotted dolphins at 80 individuals. Now, twenty years later, studies peg the Bahamian population at 200. A conservative worldwide estimate is 100,000.

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The spotted dolphin prefers the more temperate and tropical areas of the Atlantic Ocean--not South Florida. Divers looking for eyeball to eyeball encounters with the creatures usually have to cruise to the northern Bahamas. White Sand Ridge on the Little Bahama Bank is home to a colony of friendly spotted dolphins that frolic with humans of their own free will.

On February 28th, a gregarious troupe of marine mammals treated a fortunate group of visitors and locals to a rare wildlife encounter. Imagine that: You pay for a dive trip, and Greater Fort Lauderdale and Mother Nature throw in a bonus. A freebie that money can't buy.

The mission of Universal Diver Training, Inc. is to motivate teens and young adults to learn scuba diving and practice the sport as a lifelong activity. Additionally, UDT recognizes and supports experienced instructors, to encourage commitment to mentoring the next generation of dive leaders.

The UDT agency provides a broad range of training programs in most aspects of diving: sport, technical, mixed gas, fire, rescue, police, military, scientific, industrial, instructor, leadership, distance learning, continuing education, and the business of diving.

Anchor SCUBA, Inc. is a sister firm of Universal Diver Training. The full-service SCUBA and snorkeling center is a dive shop--not a boutique.

The dive shop offers a full line of equipment for the recreational, technical and commercial diver, including spear fishing and blue water hunting gear. Look to Anchor SCUBA for portable and stationary compressors, surface supply compressors (hookahs), and rental gear. Their filling station provides air, nitrox and tri-mix.

At Anchor SCUBA, owners Bob and Chris Sheridan take pride in providing clients with a safe, interesting and fun diving experience.

For more information, contact:

Bob Sheridan, President
Universal Diver Training, Inc. / Anchor SCUBA, Inc.
Coconut Creek, FL 33066 USA
Phone 954-974-5709
www.udtintl.com • www.anchorscuba.com
E-mail: tontotech@bellsouth.net

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