

HECTOR GOES FISHING

by Tanya Jenkins, Environmental Educator

ACTION GAME for the whole class. Activity can be performed inside or out

There are only 3,000 – 4,000 Hector's dolphins left in the world. They are found only in New Zealand.

Maui's dolphin (North Island Hector's dolphin) is a separate subspecies from the South Island Hector's dolphin and has been classified as 'Critically Endangered', with an estimated population of fewer than 100 individuals.

Because they hunt for food close to shore they are particularly vulnerable to set net fishing. Since 1970 more than 12,000 Maui's and Hector's dolphins have been killed in fishing nets. The Marine Mammal Sanctuary and set net restrictions around Banks Peninsula have helped to maintain South Island Hector's dolphin numbers, but more protection is needed to help save this species from extinction.

This activity explains the use of the dolphins' echo location system to find food. Where water is murky, the dolphin's eyesight is not much use. Instead, it has a special echo location system to help it find food, similar to bats in dark caves. By sending out high frequency clicks and listening for returning echos, the dolphin can tell them how far away a fish is, what kind of fish it is, and how fast it is moving.

HECTOR GOES FISHING game rules

- Students make a large circle. They are now "the shoreline". The shoreline is quiet and does not move.
- Choose one student to be a Hector's dolphin. He or she stands in the middle of the circle or the ocean.
- Hector is blindfolded because it can not see very well in the murky waters of the ocean.
- Choose another six students to stand in the circle. They are a school of fish.
- Hector calls out the word HECTOR fairly loud and the fish reply immediately with the word FISH.
- Hector needs to listen carefully to work out the direction of the fish calls and then try to catch the fish. The fish move about to avoid being caught by Hector.
- The more often Hector calls out the easier it will be for Hector to listen and locate the position of the fish.
- Students making up the coastline need to be silent for the game to work, so that Hector can hear the fish. They also need to prevent Hector from stranding, by gently turning Hector around to face the ocean if it "swims" onto the coastline.
- Take turns so that everyone has a go at being a fish.

NOTE: If Hector is not successful or it takes too long to catch the fish, stop the game. Ask the "coastline" to move forward one large step to make the ocean smaller and more difficult for fish to escape Hector.

You will find that some students are better at being a dolphin than others. I have found that children really enjoy this simple and fun game and will often play it again themselves at morning break and lunchtime.