

# People keep riding a friendly dolphin in Texas. Experts warn it could be deadly mistake

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Texas wildlife experts are urging people to steer clear of a dolphin with a

friendly reputation, out of concern for its safety.

The dolphin first started getting [human attention](#) over a year ago when it made the canals near a North Padre Island neighborhood just south of Corpus Christi its home, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) fisheries division.

"Over the past year the public has become more and more interested in the animal—even showing up to swim with, ride, jump on and pet the dolphin," NOAA said.

People have recorded their interactions with the dolphin, sharing them on social media and with friends, spurring even more residents and visitors to seek out the animal and interact with it.

"These actions could be dangerous—even fatal—for the dolphin," according to NOAA.

By interacting with the dolphin, it becomes comfortable around people, drawn to them, and even more likely to approach things it associates with humans, such as boats. This can lead to dolphins being hit by boats or getting stuck in fishing equipment.

Experts say the seemingly extroverted dolphin was recently spotted with a wound along its left side that appears to be from a boat propeller.

"It is clear that the dolphin is already in danger from the [human interactions](#) that are occurring," officials said.

NOAA is working with the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network (TMMSN) to keep tabs on the dolphin, monitoring its behavior and the severity of its injury.

While some have suggested relocating the dolphin, that won't work for several reasons, TMMSN said on [social media](#).

First, the area is the dolphin's home, and moving it from a familiar place could leave the dolphin vulnerable, as it "may not be accepted by other dolphins," and may not know how to catch different kinds of prey in the new environment.

There's also the possibility that, if moved, it will continue doing what it has been in a different place—or worse, and teach other dolphins to interact with people, according to TMMSN.

Finally, the dolphin might just find its way back to where it was moved from.

"We view this as a human behavior problem," TMMSN said. "We know if people change their behavior, the dolphin's behavior will also change, and we can prevent future injuries to people and the dolphin."

NOAA says its Office of Law Enforcement will begin ticketing people seen petting, feeding, or riding the dolphin, with fines ranging from \$100 to \$250.

"Loving them from afar is the best way to insure a dolphin's ability to thrive and live a full life," the organization said.

To report violations, call the enforcement hotline at (800) 853-1964.

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