DOLPHIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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City of Casey

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# CASEY AMBASSADORS SET SAIL INTO 2019

Marine Ambassadors spend a year developing their leadership skills, whilst discovering how diverse and important our oceans are, so they can foster positive behaviour change in their community. The boat trip aboard the Kasey Lee on Western Port to the fur seal colony at Seal Rocks is a great way to start the City of Casey Ambassadors' year and helps motivate them to become strong champions for our marine environment. This is important as we know so much about the impact humans have on the oceans, both directly through pollution, particularly plastic, and of course, climate change.

Seal Rocks is home to over 30,000 seals during the year, with up to 10,000 at any time. Seals were hunted until the early 20th century to the point of collapse, with less than 400 fur seals remaining.

Unlike other seal species that have a thick layer of fat or blubber to keep them warm in the cold, southern ocean, fur seals have a warm, waterproof coat. The first boat to leave Victoria when hunting began carried 33,000 pelts and almost 1000 gallons of oil back to Europe. To see this majestic animal recover to the numbers we see today is fantastic.

It's a breeding colony so at this time of year there are lots of bulls around and new pups born in the past week. This made for an awesome experience for the new Marine Ambassadors. The pups are only about 10kg at birth and can be left alone for a week whilst the mum goes out to feed. They are usually born as far away from the water line as possible, as new-born seals can't swim!

# ONE BLOWHOLE OR TWO?

Dolphins and whales, being mammals, need to breathe air just like we do. Living in water obviously creates a challenge as they need to come to the surface to do this. Consequently the blowhole(s) are located on the top of the head, behind the skull. These blowholes are akin to our nostrils.

In the ancestor of all modern whales and dolphins, they were located in the same place, on the face. This ancestor lived around 50 million years ago and was a small, deer-like animal that lived on land. As evolutionary changes occurred, the nostrils gradually migrated to the top of the head to allow the animals to become completely amphibious.

But why do some species only have one blowhole when we have two nostrils? The answer lies in the communication used by each species. In whales like humpbacks, blue and southern rights, there are still two blowholes. These whales are called baleen whales as they have baleen plates in their mouth instead of teeth.

For all the dolphins and toothed whales such as sperm whales, however, there is only one blowhole - the other one has evolved into the sonar centre that these animals use to communicate, navigate and also hunt! These sounds travel through the water as pressure waves and bounce back off schools of fish, boats and reefs.

Look out for our two dolphin species, the bottlenose and common, this summer and marvel at their amazing history.

*Above: common dolphin (Port Phillip) Below: humpback whale calf (Bass Strait) DRI images*